MASTERTALES OF MYSTERY

2.00

A woman at his feet was clasping his knees in thankfulness

Anna Katharine Green *Room No. 3—p. 35*

MASTER TALES *of* MYSTERY

BY THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS AUTHORS OF TO-DAY

COLLECTED AND ARRANGED BY FRANCIS J. REYNOLDS

VOLUME I

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Introduction

THE keynote of the reader's interest in present-day fiction is *interest.* No longer does the reader look for encyclopedic information mixed thoroughly through the pages of his novel. If information is wanted, the vast number of reference works found at every hand supply it.

The first object of all fiction is not to instruct but to entertain—to hold the reader's thoughts so enthralled by the plot of the story that all else is for the time being forgotten.

Granted then that fiction unadorned by actual facts is the most popular form of entertaining reading, what particular class of fiction meets the greatest demand? Why does one author have a hundred thousand readers and another a bare score? What makes the circulation of one great magazine go bounding upward while its rival struggles desperately to retain its few subscribers?

If one writer succeeds where another fails, if one publication grows while another declines, it is because the successful novelist and the popular magazine interest and entertain—have gained and hold their audiences by the bonds of pure delight.

To-day by far the most popular form of fiction is that known as Problem or Mystery Tales because it gives that added zest to entertaining fiction by injecting into it the oft puzzling plots and situations whose unravelings bring surprises at every turn. It has been aptly said that the popularity of the problem tales is due to the fact that the human mind in its daily toil is confronted by naught else but problems—that problem succeeds problem with such lightning rapidity that the mind's functions actually consist of nothing but problem solutions. Vast mysteries surround us—vaster still stretch just before our puny limits of conception. We are constantly striving to solve *something,* whether it be the merest trifle of the moment or some baffling problem that threatens to overwhelm our powers.

INTRODUCTION

Fiction that feeds this craving is fiction that we understand and appreciate—*it's our kind of story,* it fits in with our moods. Public taste is correct because it shows unmistakably the natural cravings of the general reader for mystery and problem tales as proven by their universal demand.

Mystery tales from Edgar Allan Poe through the decades that bring us to the present-day writers have ever been the most thoroughly interesting of all our fiction. Nor is this class of fiction confined to our own language, as shown by the French Gaboriau and by the Germans Hoffman, Richter, Tieck, and Chamisso, and their followers.

In the past the masters of this type of story could be named on the fingers of one hand—a small band of geniuses who, to a more or less extent, contented themselves with following in the footsteps of the first great master, Poe. He, while master of the many cruder sciences of his day, drew only upon a scant few to furnish the solutions to his mystery and problem tales, whereas to-day every science has been linked to this vogue of stories—astronomy, chemistry, physics, biology, medicine, geology, electricity—their principles all called upon to serve in the solving of problems in the realm of mystery tales.

In these volumes are gathered the preeminent mystery tales of to-day—each a master tale of an era that has produced the greatest ever penned.

F. J. Reynolds.

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Room No. 3

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

Room No. 3

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

I

"WHAT door is that? You've opened all the others; why do you pass that one by?"

"Oh, that! That's only Number 3. A mere closet, gentlemen," responded the landlord in a pleasant voice. "To be sure, we sometimes use it as a sleeping-room when we are hard pushed. Jake, the clerk you saw below, used it last night. But it's not on our regular list. Do you want a peep at it?"

"Most assuredly. As you know, it's our duty to see every room in this house, whether it is on your regular list or not."

"All right. I haven't the key of this one with me. But —yes, I have. There, gentlemen!" he cried, unlocking the door and holding it open for them to look inside. "You see it no more answers the young lady's description than the others do. And I haven't another to show you. You have seen all those in front, and this is the last one in the rear. You'll have to believe our story. The old lady never put foot in this tavern."

The two men he addressed peered into the shadowy recesses before them, and one of them, a tall and uncommonly good-looking young man of stalwart build and unusually earnest manner, stepped softly inside. He was a gentleman farmer living near, recently appointed deputy sheriff on account of a recent outbreak of horse-stealing in the neighborhood.

"I observe," he remarked, after a hurried glance about him, "that the paper on these walls is not at all like that she describes. She was very particular about the paper; said that it was of a muddy pink color and had big scrolls on it

which seemed to move and crawl about in whirls as you looked at it. This paper is blue and striped. Otherwise—"

"Let's go below," suggested his companion, who, from the deference with which his most casual word was received, was evidently a man of some authority. "It's cold here, and there are several new questions I should like to put to the young lady. Mr. Quimby,"—this to the landlord, "I've no doubt you are right, but we'll give this poor girl another chance. I believe in giving every one the utmost chance possible."

"My reputation is in your hands, Coroner Golden," was the quiet reply. Then, as they both turned, "my reputation against the word of an obviously demented girl."

The words made their own echo. As the third man moved to follow the other two into the hall, he seemed to catch this echo, for he involuntarily cast another look behind him as if expectant of some contradiction reaching him from the bare and melancholy walls he was leaving. But no such contradiction came. Instead, he appeared to read confirmation there of the landlord's plain and unembittered statement. The dull blue paper with its old-fashioned and uninteresting stripes seemed to have disfigured the walls for years. It was not only grimy with age, but showed here and there huge discolored spots, especially around the stovepipe-hole high up on the left-hand side. Certainly he was a dreamer to doubt such plain evidences as these. Yet—

Here his eye encountered Quimby's, and pulling himself up short, he hastily fell into the wake of his comrade now hastening down the narrow passage to the wider hall in front. Had it occurred to him to turn again before rounding the corner—but no, I doubt if he would have learned anything even then. The closing of a door by a careful hand—the slipping up behind him of an eager and noiseless step—what is there in these to re-awaken curiosity and fix suspicion? Nothing, when the man concerned is Jacob Quimby; nothing. Better that he failed to look back; it left his judgment freer for the question confronting him in the room below.

Three Forks Tavern has been long forgotten, but at the time of which I write it was a well-known but little-fre-

quented house, situated just back of the highway on the verge of the forest lying between the two towns of Chester and Danton in southern Ohio. It was of ancient build, and had all the picturesqueness of age and the English traditions of its original builder. Though so near two thriving towns, it retained its own quality of apparent remoteness from city life and city ways. This in a measure was made possible by the nearness of the woods which almost enveloped it; but the character of the man who ran it had still more to do with it, his sympathies being entirely with the old, and not at all with the new, as witness the old-style glazing still retained in its ancient doorway. This, while it appealed to a certain class of summer boarders, did not so much meet the wants of the casual traveler, so that while the house might from some reason or other be overfilled one night, it was just as likely to be almost empty the next, save for the faithful few who loved the woods and the ancient ways of the easy-mannered host and his attentive, soft-stepping help. The building itself was of wooden construction, high in front and low in the rear, with gables toward the highway, projecting here and there above a strip of rude old-fashioned carving. These gables were new, that is, they were only a century old; the portion now called the extension, in the passages of which we first found the men we have introduced to you, was the original house. Then it may have enjoyed the sunshine and air of the valley it overlooked, but now it was so hemmed in by yards and outbuildings as to be considered the most undesirable part of the house, and Number 3 the most undesirable of its rooms; which certainly does not speak well for it.

But we are getting away from our new friends and their mysterious errand. As I have already intimated, this tavern with the curious name (a name totally unsuggestive, by the way, of its location on a perfectly straight road) had for its southern aspect the road and a broad expanse beyond of varied landscape which made the front rooms cheerful even on a cloudy day; but it was otherwise with those in the rear and on the north end. They were never cheerful, and especially toward night were frequently so dark that artificial light was resorted to as early as three o'clock in

the afternoon. It was so to-day in the remote parlor which these three now entered. A lamp had been lit, though the daylight still struggled feebly in, and it was in this conflicting light that there rose up before them the vision of a woman, who seen at any time and in any place would have drawn, if not held, the eye, but seen in her present attitude and at such a moment of question and suspense, struck the imagination with a force likely to fix her image forever in the mind, if not in the heart, of a sympathetic observer.

I should like to picture her as she stood there, because the impression she made at this instant determined the future action of the man I have introduced to you as not quite satisfied with the appearances he had observed above. Young, slender but vigorous, with a face whose details you missed in the fire of her eye and the wonderful red of her young, fresh but determined mouth, she stood, on guard as it were, before a shrouded form on a couch at the far end of the room. An imperative *Keep back!* spoke in her look, her attitude, and the silent gesture of one outspread hand, but it was the *Keep back!* of love, not of fear, the command of an outraged soul, conscious of its rights and instinctively alert to maintain them.

The landlord at sight of the rebuke thus given to their intrusion, stepped forward with a conciliatory bow.

"I beg pardon," said he, "but these gentlemen, Doctor Golden, the coroner from Chester, and Mr. Hammersmith, wish to ask you a few more questions about your mother's death. You will answer them, I am sure."

Slowly her eyes moved till they met those of the speaker.

"I am anxious to do so," said she, in a voice rich with many emotions. But seeing the open compassion in the landlord's face, the color left her cheeks, almost her lips, and drawing back the hand which she had continued to hold outstretched, she threw a glance of helpless inquiry about her which touched the younger man's heart and induced him to say:

"The truth should not be hard to find in a case like this. I'm sure the young lady can explain. Doctor Golden, are you ready for her story?"

The coroner, who had been silent up till now, probably

from sheer surprise at the beauty and simple, natural elegance of the woman caught, as he believed, in a net of dreadful tragedy, roused himself at this direct question, and bowing with an assumption of dignity far from encouraging to the man and woman anxiously watching him, replied:

"We will hear what she has to say, of course, but the facts are well known. The woman she calls mother was found early this morning lying on her face in the adjoining woods quite dead. She had fallen over a half-concealed root, and with such force that she never moved again. If her daughter was with her at the time, then that daughter fled without attempting to raise her. The condition and position of the wound on the dead woman's forehead, together with such corroborative facts as have since come to light, preclude all argument on this point. But we'll listen to the young woman, notwithstanding; she has a right to speak, and she shall speak. Did not your mother die in the woods? No hocus-pocus, miss, but the plain unvarnished truth."

"Sirs,"—the term was general, but her appeal appeared to be directed solely to the one sympathetic figure before her, "if my mother died in the wood—and, for all I can say, she may have done so—it was not till after she had been in this house. She arrived in my company, and was given a room. I saw the room and I saw her in it. I cannot be deceived in this. If I am, then my mind has suddenly failed me;—something which I find it hard to believe."

"Mr. Quimby, did Mrs. Demarest come to the house with Miss Demarest?" inquired Mr. Hammersmith of the silent landlord.

"She says so," was the reply, accompanied by a compassionate shrug which spoke volumes. "And I am quite sure she means it," he added, with kindly emphasis. "But ask Jake, who was in the office all the evening. Ask my wife, who saw the young lady to her room. Ask anybody and everybody who was around the tavern last night. I'm not the only one to say that Miss Demarest came in alone. All will tell you that she arrived here without escort of any kind; declined supper, but wanted a room, and when I hesitated to give it to her, said by way of explanation of her lack of a companion that she had had trouble in Chester and had left

town very hurriedly for her home. That her mother was coming to meet her and would probably arrive here very soon. That when this occurred I was to notify her; but if a gentleman called instead, I was to be very careful not to admit that any such person as herself was in the house. Indeed, to avoid any such possibility she prayed that her name might be left off the register—a favor which I was slow in granting her, but which I finally did, as you can see for yourselves."

"Oh!" came in indignant exclamation from the young woman before them. "I understand my position now. This man has a bad conscience. He has something to hide, or he would not take to lying about little things like that. I never asked him to allow me to leave my name off the register. On the contrary I wrote my name in it and my mother's name, too. Let him bring the book here and you will see."

"We have seen," responded the coroner. "We looked in the register ourselves. Your names are not there."

The flush of indignation which had crimsoned her cheeks faded till she looked as startling and individual in her pallor as she had the moment before in her passionate bloom.

"Not there?" fell from her lips in a frozen monotone as her eyes grew fixed upon the faces before her and her hand went groping around for some support.

Mr. Hammersmith approached with a chair.

"Sit," he whispered. Then, as she sank slowly into an attitude of repose, he added gently, "You shall have every consideration. Only tell the truth, the exact truth without any heightening from your imagination, and, above all, don't be frightened."

She may have heard his words, but she gave no sign of comprehending them. She was following the movements of the landlord, who had slipped out to procure the register, and now stood holding it out toward the coroner.

"Let her see for herself," he suggested, with a bland, almost fatherly, air.

Doctor Golden took the book and approached Miss Demarest.

"Here is a name very unlike yours," he pointed out, as

her eye fell on the page he had opened to. "Annette Colvin, Lansing, Michigan."

"That is not my name or writing," said she.

"There is room below it for your name and that of your mother, but the space is blank, do you see?"

"Yes, yes, I see," she admitted. "Yet I wrote my name in the book! Or is it all a monstrous dream!"

The coroner returned the book to the landlord.

"Is this your only book?" he asked.

"The only book."

Miss Demarest's eyes flashed. Hammersmith, who had watched this scene with intense interest, saw, or believed that he saw, in this flash the natural indignation of a candid mind face to face with arrant knavery. But when he forced himself to consider the complacent Quimby he did not know what to think. His aspect of self-confidence equaled hers. Indeed, he showed the greater poise. Yet her tones rang true as she cried:

"You made up one plausible story, and you may well make up another. I demand the privilege of relating the whole occurrence as I remember it," she continued with an appealing look in the one sympathetic direction. "Then you can listen to him."

"We desire nothing better," returned the coroner.

"I shall have to mention a circumstance very mortifying to myself," she proceeded, with a sudden effort at self-control, which commanded the admiration even of the coroner. "My one adviser is dead," here her eyes flashed for a moment toward the silent form behind her. "If I make mistakes, if I seem unwomanly—but you have asked for the truth and you shall have it, all of it. I have no father. Since early this morning I have had no mother. But when I had, I found it my duty to work for her as well as for myself, that she might have the comforts she had been used to and could no longer afford. For this purpose I sought a situation in Chester, and found one in a family I had rather not name." A momentary tremor, quickly suppressed, betrayed the agitation which this allusion cost her. "My mother lived in Danton (the next town to the left). Anybody there will tell you what a good woman she was. I had wished her to

live in Chester (that is, at first; later, I—I was glad she didn't), but she had been born in Danton, and could not accustom herself to strange surroundings. Once a week I went home, and once a week, usually on a Wednesday, she would come and meet me on the highroad, for a little visit. Once we met here, but this is a circumstance no one seems to remember. I was very fond of my mother and she of me. Had I loved no one else, I should have been happy still, and not been obliged to face strangers over her body and bare the secrets of my heart to preserve my good name. There is a man, he seems a thousand miles away from me now, so much have I lived since yesterday. He—he lived in the house where I did—was one of the family—always at table—always before my eyes. He fancied me. I—I might have fancied him had he been a better man. But he was far from being of the sort my mother approved, and when he urged his suit too far, I grew frightened and finally ran away. It was not so much that I could not trust him," she bravely added after a moment of silent confusion, "but that I could not trust myself. He had an unfortunate influence over me, which I hated while I half yielded to it."

"You ran away. When was this?"

"Yesterday afternoon at about six. He had vowed that he would see me again before the evening was over, and I took that way to prevent a meeting. There was no other so simple,—or such was my thought at the time. I did not dream that sorrows awaited me in this quiet tavern, and perplexities so much greater than any which could have followed a meeting with him that I feel my reason fail when I contemplate them."

"Go on," urged the coroner, after a moment of uneasy silence. "Let us hear what happened after you left your home in Chester."

"I went straight to the nearest telegraph office, and sent a message to my mother. I told her I was coming home, and for her to meet me on the road near this tavern. Then I went to Hudson's and had supper, for I had not eaten before leaving my employer's. The sun had set when I finally started, and I walked fast so as to reach Three Forks before dark. If my mother had got the telegram at once, which I

calculated on her doing, as she lived next door to the telegraph office in Danton, she would be very near this place on my arrival here. So I began to look for her as soon as I entered the woods. But I did not see her. I came as far as the tavern door, and still I did not see her. But farther on, just where the road turns to cross the railroad-track, I spied her coming, and ran to meet her. She was glad to see me, but asked many questions which I had some difficulty in answering. She saw this, and held me to the matter till I had satisfied her. When this was done it was late and cold, and we decided to come to the tavern for the night. *And we came!* Nothing shall ever make me deny so positive a fact. *We came,* and this man received us."

With her final repetition of this assertion, she rose and now stood upright, with her finger pointing straight at Quimby. Had he cringed or let his eyes waver from hers by so much as a hair's breadth, her accusation would have stood and her cause been won. But not a flicker disturbed the steady patience of his look, and Hammersmith, who had made no effort to hide his anxiety to believe her story, showed his disappointment with equal frankness as he asked:

"Who else was in the office? Surely Mr. Quimby was not there alone?"

She reseated herself before answering. Hammersmith could see the effort she made to recall that simple scene. He found himself trying to recall it, too—the old-fashioned, smoke-begrimed office, with its one long window toward the road and the glass-paned door leading into the hall of entrance. They had come in by that door and crossed to the bar, which was also the desk in this curious old hostelry. He could see them standing there in the light of possibly a solitary lamp, the rest of the room in shadow unless a game of checkers were on, which evidently was not so on this night. Had she turned her head to peer into those shadows? It was not likely. She was supported by her mother's presence, and this she was going to say. By some strange telepathy that he would have laughed at a few hours before, he feels confident of her words before she speaks. Yet he listens intently as she finally looks up and answers:

"There was a man, I am sure there was a man somewhere

at the other end of the office. But I paid no attention to him. I was bargaining for two rooms and registering my name and that of my mother."

"Two rooms; why two? You are not a fashionable young lady to require a room alone."

"Gentlemen, I was tired. I had been through a wearing half-hour. I knew that if we occupied the same room or even adjoining ones that nothing could keep us from a night of useless and depressing conversation. I did not feel equal to it, so I asked for two rooms a short distance apart."

An explanation which could at least be accepted. Mr. Hammersmith felt an increase of courage and scarcely winced as his colder-blooded companion continued this unofficial examination by asking:

"Where were you standing when making these arrangements with Mr. Quimby?"

"Right before the desk."

"And your mother?"

"She was at my left and a little behind me. She was a shy woman. I usually took the lead when we were together."

"Was she veiled?" the coroner continued quietly.

"I think so. She had been crying—" The bereaved daughter paused.

"But don't you know?"

"My impression is that her veil was down when we came into the room. She may have lifted it as she stood there. I know that it was lifted as we went upstairs. I remember feeling glad that the lamps gave so poor a light, she looked so distressed."

"Physically, do you mean, or mentally?"

Mr. Hammersmith asked this question. It seemed to rouse some new train of thought in the girl's mind. For a minute she looked intently at the speaker, then she replied in a disturbed tone:

"Both. I wonder—" Here her thought wavered and she ceased.

"Go on," ordered the coroner impatiently. "Tell your story. It contradicts that of the landlord in almost every point, but we've promised to hear it out, and we will."

Rousing, she hastened to obey him.

"Mr. Quimby told the truth when he said that he asked me if I would have supper, also when he repeated what I said about a gentleman, but not when he declared that I wished to be told if my mother should come and ask for me. My mother was at my side all the time we stood there talking, and I did not need to make any requests concerning her. When we went to our rooms a woman accompanied us. He says she is his wife. I should like to see that woman."

"I am here, miss," spoke up a voice from a murky corner no one had thought of looking in till now.

Miss Demarest at once rose, waiting for the woman to come forward. This she did with a quick, natural step which insensibly prepared the mind for the brisk, assertive woman who now presented herself. Mr. Hammersmith, at sight of her open, not unpleasing face, understood for the first time the decided attitude of the coroner. If this woman corroborated her husband's account, the poor young girl, with her incongruous beauty and emotional temperament, would not have much show. He looked to see her quailing now. But instead of that she stood firm, determined, and feverishly beautiful.

"Let her tell you what took place upstairs," she cried. "She showed us the rooms and carried water afterward to the one my mother occupied."

"I am sorry to contradict the young lady," came in even tones from the unembarrassed, motherly looking woman thus appealed to. "She thinks that her mother was with her and that I conducted this mother to another room after showing her to her own. I don't doubt in the least that she has worked herself up to the point of absolutely believing this. But the facts are these: She came alone and went to her room unattended by any one but myself. And what is more, she seemed entirely composed at the time, and I never thought of suspecting the least thing wrong. Yet her mother lay all that time in the wood—"

"Silence!"

This word was shot at her by Miss Demarest, who had risen to her full height and now fairly flamed upon them all in her passionate indignation. "I will not listen to such words till I have finished all I have to say and put these

liars to the blush. My mother *was* with me, and this woman witnessed our good-night embrace, and then showed my mother to her own room. I watched them going. They went down the hall to the left and around a certain corner. I stood looking after them till they turned this corner, then I closed my door and began to take off my hat. But I wasn't quite satisfied with the good-night which had passed between my poor mother and myself, and presently I opened my door and ran down the hall and around the corner on a chance of finding her room. I don't remember very well how that hall looked. I passed several doors seemingly shut for the night, and should have turned back, confused, if at that moment I had not spied the landlady's figure, your figure, madam, coming out of one room on your way to another. You were carrying a pitcher, and I made haste and ran after you and reached the door just before you turned to shut it. Can you deny that, or that you stepped aside while I ran in and gave my mother another hug? If you can and do, then you are a dangerous and lying woman, or I— But I won't admit that I'm not all right. It is you, base and untruthful woman, who for some end I cannot fathom persist in denying facts on which my honor, if not my life, depends. Why, gentlemen, you, one of you at least, have heard me describe the very room in which I saw my mother. It is imprinted on my mind. I didn't know at the time that I took especial notice of it, but hardly a detail escaped me. The paper on the wall—"

"We have been looking through the rooms," interpolated the coroner. "We do not find any papered with the muddy pink you talk about."

She stared, drew back from them all, and finally sank into a chair. "You do not find— But you have not been shown them all."

"I think so."

"You have not. There *is* such a room. I could not have dreamed it."

Silence met this suggestion.

Throwing up her hands like one who realizes for the first time that the battle is for life, she let an expression of her despair and desolation rush in frenzy from her lips:

"It's a conspiracy. The whole thing is a conspiracy. If my mother had had money on her or had worn valuable jewelry, I should believe her to have been a victim of this lying man and woman. As it is, I don't trust them. They say that my poor mother was found lying ready dressed and quite dead in the wood. That may be true, for I saw men bringing her in. But if so, what warrant have we that she was not lured there, slaughtered, and made to seem the victim of accident by this unscrupulous man and woman? Such things have been done; but for a daughter to fabricate such a plot as they impute to me is past belief, out of Nature and impossible. With all their wiles, they cannot prove it. I dare them to do so; I dare any one to do so."

Then she begged to be allowed to search the house for the room she so well remembered. "When I show you that," she cried, with ringing assurance, "you will believe the rest of my story."

"Shall I take the young lady up myself?" asked Mr. Quimby. "Or will it be enough if my wife accompanies her?"

"We will all accompany her," said the coroner.

"Very good," came in hearty acquiescence.

"It's the only way to quiet her," he whispered in Mr. Hammersmith's ear.

The latter turned on him suddenly.

"None of your insinuations," he cried. "She's as far from insane as I am myself. We shall find the room."

"You, too," fell softly from the other's lips as he stepped back into the coroner's wake. Mr. Hammersmith gave his arm to Miss Demarest, and the landlady brought up the rear.

"Upstairs," ordered the trembling girl. "We will go first to the room I occupied."

As they reached the door, she motioned them all back, and started away from them down the hall. Quickly they followed. "It was around a corner," she muttered broodingly, halting at the first turning. "That is all I remember. But we'll visit every room."

"We have already," objected the coroner, but meeting

Mr. Hammersmith's warning look, he desisted from further interference.

"I remember its appearance perfectly. I remember it as if it were my own," she persisted, as door after door was thrown back and as quickly shut again at a shake of her head. "Isn't there another hall? Might I not have turned some other corner?"

"Yes, there is another hall," acquiesced the landlord, leading the way into the passage communicating with the extension.

"Oh!" she murmured, as she noted the increased interest in both the coroner and his companion; "we shall find it here."

"Do you recognize the hall?" asked the coroner as they stepped through a narrow opening into the old part.

"No, but I shall recognize the room."

"Wait!" It was Hammersmith who called her back as she was starting forward. "I should like you to repeat just how much furniture this room contained and where it stood."

She stopped, startled, and then said:

"It was awfully bare; a bed was on the left—"

"On the left?"

"She said the left," quoth the landlord, "though I don't see that it matters; it's all fancy with her."

"Go on," kindly urged Hammersmith.

"There was a window. I saw the dismal panes and my mother standing between them and me. I can't describe the little things."

"Possibly because there were none to describe," whispered Hammersmith in his superior's ear.

Meanwhile the landlord and his wife awaited their advance with studied patience. As Miss Demarest joined him, he handed her a bunch of keys, with the remark:

"None of these rooms are occupied to-day, so you can open them without hesitation."

She stared at him and ran quickly forward. Mr. Hammersmith followed speedily after. Suddenly both paused. She had lost the thread of her intention before opening a single door.

"I thought I could go straight to it," she declared. "I shall have to open all the doors, as we did in the other hall."

"Let me help you," proffered Mr. Hammersmith. She accepted his aid, and the search recommenced with the same results as before. Hope sank to disappointment as each door was passed. The vigor of her step was gone, and as she paused heartsick before the last and only remaining door, it was with an ashy face she watched Mr. Hammersmith stoop to insert the key.

He, on his part, as the door fell back, watched her for some token of awakened interest. But he watched in vain. The smallness of the room, its bareness, its one window, the absence of all furniture save the solitary cot drawn up on the right (not on the left, as she had said), seemed to make little or no impression on her.

"The last! the last! and I have not found it. Oh, sir," she moaned, catching at Mr. Hammersmith's arm, "am I then mad? Was it a dream? Or is this a dream? I feel that I no longer know." Then, as the landlady officiously stepped up, she clung with increased frenzy to Mr. Hammersmith, crying, with positive wildness, *"This* is the dream! The room I remember is a real one and my story is real. Prove it, or my reason will leave me. I feel it going—going—"

"Hush!" It was Hammersmith who sought thus to calm her. "Your story *is* real and I will prove it so. Meanwhile trust your reason. It will not fail you."

He had observed the corners of the landlord's hitherto restrained lips settle into a slightly sarcastic curl as the door of this room closed for the second time.

II

"The girl's beauty has imposed on you."

"I don't think so. I should be sorry to think myself so weak. I simply credit her story more than I do that of Quimby."

"But his is supported by several witnesses. Hers has no support at all."

"That is what strikes me as so significant. This man Quimby understands himself. Who are his witnesses? His wife and his head man. There is nobody else. In the half-hour which has just passed I have searched diligently for some disinterested testimony supporting his assertion, but I have found none. No one knows anything. Of the three persons occupying rooms in the extension last night, two were asleep and the third overcome with drink. The maids won't talk. They seem uneasy, and I detected a sly look pass from the one to the other at some question I asked, but they won't talk. There's a conspiracy somewhere. I'm as sure of it as that I am standing here."

"Nonsense! What should there be a conspiracy about? You would make this old woman an important character. Now we know that she wasn't. Look at the matter as it presents itself to an unprejudiced mind. A young and susceptible girl falls in love with a man, who is at once a gentleman and a scamp. She may have tried to resist her feelings, and she may not have. Your judgment and mine would probably differ on this point. What she does *not* do is to let her mother into her confidence. She sees the man—runs upon him, if you will, in places or under circumstances she cannot avoid—till her judgment leaves her and the point of catastrophe is reached. Then, possibly, she awakens, or what is more probable, seeks to protect herself from the penetration and opposition of his friends by meetings less open that those in which they had lately indulged. She says that she left the house to escape seeing him again last night. But this is not true. On the contrary, she must have given him to understand where she was going, for she had an interview with him in the woods before she came upon her mother. He acknowledges to the interview. I have just had a talk with him over the telephone."

"Then you know his name?"

"Yes, of course, she had to tell me. It's young Maxwell. I suspected it from the first."

"Maxwell!" Mr. Hammersmith's cheek showed an indignant color. Or was it a reflection from the setting sun? "You called him a scamp a few minutes ago. A scamp's word isn't worth much."

"No, but it's evidence when on oath, and I fancy he will swear to the interview."

"Well, well, say there was an interview."

"It changes things, Mr. Hammersmith. It changes things. It makes possible a certain theory of mine which accounts for all the facts."

"It does!"

"Yes. I don't think this girl is really responsible. I don't believe she struck her mother or is deliberately telling a tissue of lies to cover up some dreadful crime. I consider her the victim of a mental hallucination, the result of some great shock. Now what was the shock? I'll tell you. This is how I see it, how Mr. Quimby sees it, and such others in the house as have ventured an opinion. She was having this conversation with her lover in the woods below here when her mother came in sight. Surprised, for she had evidently not expected her mother to be so prompt, she hustled her lover off and hastened to meet the approaching figure. But it was too late. The mother had seen the man, and in the excitement of the discovery and the altercation which undoubtedly followed, made such a sudden move, possibly of indignant departure, that her foot was caught by one of the roots protruding at this point and she fell her whole length and with such violence as to cause immediate death. Now, Mr. Hammersmith, stop a minute and grasp the situation. If, as I believe at this point in the inquiry, Miss Demarest had encountered a passionate opposition to her desires from this upright and thoughtful mother, the spectacle of this mother lying dead before her, with all opposition gone and the way cleared in an instant to her wishes, but cleared in a manner which must haunt her to her own dying day, was enough to turn a brain already heated with contending emotions. Fancies took the place of facts, and by the time she reached this house had so woven themselves into a concrete form that no word she now utters can be relied on. This is how I see it, Mr. Hammersmith, and it is on this basis I shall act."

Hammersmith made an effort and, nodding slightly, said in a restrained tone:

"Perhaps you are justified. I have no wish to force my

own ideas upon you; they are much too vague at present. I will only suggest that this is not the first time the attention of the police has been drawn to this house by some mysterious occurrence. You remember the Stevens case? There must have been notes to the amount of seven thousand dollars in the pile he declared had been taken from him some time during the day and night he lodged here."

"Stevens! I remember something about it. But they couldn't locate the theft here. The fellow had been to the fair in Chester all day and couldn't swear that he had seen his notes after leaving the grounds."

"I know. But he always looked on Quimby as the man. Then there is the adventure of little Miss Thistlewaite."

"I don't remember that."

"It didn't get into the papers; but it was talked about in the neighborhood. She is a quaint one, full of her crotchets, but clear—clear as a bell where her interests are involved. She took a notion to spend a summer here—in this house, I mean. She had a room in one of the corners overlooking the woods, and professing to prefer Nature to everything else, was happy enough till she began to miss things—rings, pins, a bracelet and, finally, a really valuable chain. She didn't complain at first—the objects were trivial, and she herself somewhat to blame for leaving them lying around in her room, often without locking the door. But when the chain went, the matter became serious, and she called Mr. Quimby's attention to her losses. He advised her to lock her door, which she was careful to do after that, but not with the expected result. She continued to miss things, mostly jewelry of which she had a ridiculous store. Various domestics were dismissed, and finally one of the permanent boarders was requested to leave, but still the thefts went on till, her patience being exhausted, she notified the police and a detective was sent: I have always wished I had been that detective. The case ended in what was always considered a joke. Another object disappeared while he was there, and it having been conclusively proved to him that it could not have been taken by way of the door, he turned his attention to the window which it was one of her freaks always to keep wide open. The result was curious. One day he spied from

a hiding-place he had made in the bushes a bird flying out from that window, and following the creature till she alighted in her nest he climbed the tree and searched that nest. It was encrusted with jewels. The bird was a magpie and had followed its usual habits, but—the chain was not there, nor one or two other articles of decided value. Nor were they ever found. The bird bore the blame; the objects missing were all heavy and might have been dropped in its flight, but I have always thought that the bird had an accomplice, a knowing fellow who understood what's what and how to pick out his share."

The coroner smiled. There was little conviction and much sarcasm in that smile. Hammersmith turned away. "Have you any instructions for me?" he said.

"Yes, you had better stay here. I will return in the morning with my jury. It won't take long after that to see this thing through."

The look he received in reply was happily hidden from him.

III

"Yes, I'm going to stay here to-night. As it's a mere formality, I shall want a room to sit in, and if you have no objection I'll take Number 3 on the rear corridor."

"I'm sorry, but Number 3 is totally unfit for use, as you've already seen."

"Oh, I'm not particular. Put a table in and a good light, and I'll get along with the rest. I have something to do. Number 3 will answer."

The landlord shifted his feet, cast a quick scrutinizing look at the other's composed face, and threw back his head with a quick laugh.

"As you will. I can't make you comfortable on such short notice, but that's your lookout. I've several other rooms vacant."

"I fancy that room," was all the reply he got.

Mr. Quimby at once gave his orders. They were received by Jake with surprise.

Fifteen minutes later Hammersmith prepared to install

himself in these desolate quarters. But before doing so he walked straight to the small parlor where he had last seen Miss Demarest and, knocking, asked for the privilege of a word with her. It was not her figure, however, which appeared in the doorway, but that of the landlady.

"Miss Demarest is not here," announced that buxom and smooth-tongued woman. "She was like to faint after you gentlemen left the room, and I just took her upstairs to a quiet place by herself."

"On the rear corridor?"

"Oh, no, sir; a nice front room; we don't consider money in a case like this."

"Will you give me its number?"

Her suave and steady look changed to one of indignation.

"You're asking a good deal, aren't you? I doubt if the young lady—"

"The number, if you please," he quietly put in.

"Thirty-two," she snapped out. "She will have every care," she hastened to assure him as he turned away.

"I've no doubt. I do not intend to sleep to-night; if the young lady is worse, you will communicate the fact to me. You will find *me* in Number 3.

He had turned back to make this reply, and was looking straight at her as the number dropped from his lips. It did not disturb her set smile, but in some inscrutable way all meaning seemed to leave that smile, and she forgot to drop her hand which had been stretched out in an attempted gesture.

"Number 3," he repeated. "Don't forget, madam."

The injunction seemed superfluous. She had not dropped her hand when he wheeled around once more in taking the turn at the foot of the staircase.

Jake and a very sleepy maid were on the floor above when he reached it. He paid no attention to Jake, but he eyed the girl somewhat curiously. She was comparatively a new domestic in the tavern, having been an inmate there for only three weeks. He had held a few minutes' conversation with her during the half-hour of secret inquiry in which he had previously indulged and he remembered some of her careful answers, also the air of fascination with which she had

watched him all the time they were together. He had made nothing of her then, but the impression had remained that she was the one hopeful source of knowledge in the house. Now she looked dull and moved about in Jake's wake like an automaton. Yet Hammersmith made up his mind to speak to her as soon as the least opportunity offered.

"Where is 32?" he asked as he moved away from them in the opposite direction from the course they were taking.

"I thought you were to have room Number 3," blurted out Jake.

"I am. But where is 32?"

"Round there," said she. "A lady's in there now. The one—"

"Come on," urged Jake. "Huldah, you may go now. I'll show the gentleman his room."

Huldah dropped her head, and began to move off, but not before Hammersmith had caught her eye.

"Thirty-two," he formed with his lips, showing her a scrap of paper which he held in his hand.

He thought she nodded, but he could not be sure. Nevertheless, he ventured to lay the scrap down on a small table he was passing, and when he again looked back, saw that it was gone and Huldah with it. But whither, he could not be quite sure. There was always a risk in these attempts, and he only half trusted the girl. She might carry it to 32, and she might carry it to Quimby. In the first case, Miss Demarest would know that she had an active and watchful friend in the house; in the other, the dubious landlord would but receive an open instead of veiled intimation that the young deputy had his eye on him and was not to be fooled by appearances and the lack of evidence to support his honest convictions.

They had done little more than he had suggested to make Number 3 habitable. As the door swung open under Jake's impatient hand, the half-lighted hollow of the almost empty room gaped uninvitingly before them, with just a wooden-bottomed chair and a rickety table added to the small cot-bed which had been almost its sole furnishing when he saw it last. The walls, bare as his hand, stretched without relief from base-board to ceiling, and the floor from door to window

showed an unbroken expanse of unpainted boards, save for the narrow space between chair and table, where a small rug had been laid. A cheerless outlook for a tired man, but it seemed to please Hammersmith. There was paper and ink on the table, and the lamp which he took care to examine held oil enough to last till morning. With a tray of eatables, this ought to suffice, or so his manner conveyed, and Jake, who had already supplied the eatables, was backing slowly out when his eye, which seemingly against his will had been traveling curiously up and down the walls, was caught by that of Hammersmith, and he plunged from the room, with a flush visible even in that half light.

It was a trivial circumstance, but it fitted in with Hammersmith's trend of thought at the moment, and when the man was gone he stood for several minutes with his own eye traveling up and down those dusky walls in an inquiry which this distant inspection did not seem thoroughly to satisfy, for in another instant he had lifted a glass of water from the tray and, going to the nearest wall, began to moisten the paper at one of the edges. When it was quite wet, he took out his penknife, but before using it, he looked behind him, first at the door, and then at the window. The door was shut; the window seemingly guarded by an outside blind; but the former was not locked, and the latter showed, upon closer inspection, a space between the slats which he did not like. Crossing to the door, he carefully turned the key, then proceeding to the window, he endeavored to throw up the sash in order to close the blinds more effectually. But he found himself balked in the attempt. The cord had been cut and the sash refused to move under his hand.

Casting a glance of mingled threat and sarcasm out into the night, he walked back to the wall and, dashing more water over the spot he had already moistened, began to pick at the loosened edges of the paper which were slowly falling away. The result was a disappointment; how great a disappointment he presently realized, as his knife-point encountered only plaster under the peeling edges of the paper. He had hoped to find other paper under the blue—the paper which Miss Demarest remembered—and not finding it, was conscious of a sinking of the heart which had never attended

any of his miscalculations before. Were his own feelings involved in this matter? It would certainly seem so.

Astonished at his own sensations, he crossed back to the table, and sinking into the chair beside it, endeavored to call up his common sense, or at least shake himself free from the glamour which had seized him. But this especial sort of glamour is not so easily shaken off. Minutes passed—an hour, and little else filled his thoughts than the position of this bewitching girl and the claims she had on his sense of justice. If he listened, it was to hear her voice raised in appeal at his door. If he closed his eyes, it was to see her image more plainly on the background of his consciousness. The stillness into which the house had sunk aided this absorption and made his battle a losing one. There was naught to distract his mind, and when he dozed, as he did for a while after midnight, it was to fall under the conjuring effect of dreams in which her form dominated with all the force of an unfettered fancy. The pictures which his imagination thus brought before him were startling and never to be forgotten. The first was that of an angry sea in the blue light of an arctic winter. Stars flecked the zenith and shed a pale lustre on the moving ice-floes hurrying toward a horizon of skurrying clouds and rising waves. On one of those floes stood a woman alone, with face set toward her death.

The scene changed. A desert stretched out before him. Limitless, with the blazing colors of the arid sand topped by a cloudless sky, it revealed but one suggestion of life in its herbless, waterless, shadowless solitude. *She* stood in the midst of this desert, and as he had seen her sway on the ice-floe, so he saw her now stretching unavailing arms to the brazen heavens and sink—No! it was not a desert, it was not a sea, ice-bound or torrid, it was a toppling city, massed against impenetrable night one moment, then shown to its awful full the next by the sudden tearing through of lightning-flashes. He saw it all—houses, churches, towers, erect and with steadfast line, a silhouette of quiet rest awaiting dawn; then at a flash, the doom, the quake, the breaking down of outline, the caving in of walls, followed by the sickening collapse in which life, wealth, and innumerable beating human hearts went down into the unseen and unknowable.

He saw and he heard, but his eyes clung to but one point, his ears listened for but one cry. There at the extremity of a cornice, clinging to a bending beam, was the figure again—the woman of the ice-floe and the desert. She seemed nearer now. He could see the straining muscles of her arm, the white despair of her set features. He wished to call aloud to her not to look down—then, as the sudden darkness yielded to another illuminating gleam, his mind changed and he would fain have begged her to look, slip, and end all, for subtly, quietly, ominously somewhere below her feet, he had caught the glimpsing of a feathery line of smoke curling up from the lower débris. Flame was there; a creeping devil which soon—

Horror! it was no dream! He was awake, he, Hammersmith, in this small solitary hotel in Ohio, and there was fire, real fire in the air, and in his ears the echo of a shriek such as a man hears but few times in his life, even if his lot casts him continually among the reckless and the suffering. Was it *hers?* Had these dreams been forerunners of some menacing danger? He was on his feet, his eyes staring at the floor beneath him, through the cracks of which wisps of smoke were forcing their way up. The tavern was not only on fire, *but on fire directly under him.* This discovery woke him effectually. He bounded to the door; it would not open. He wrenched at the key; but it would not turn, it was hampered in the lock. Drawing back, he threw his whole weight against the panels, uttering loud cries for help. The effort was useless. No yielding in the door, no rush to his assistance from without. Aroused now to his danger—reading the signs of the broken cord and hampered lock only too well—he desisted from his vain attempts and turned desperately toward the window. Though it might be impossible to hold up the sash and crawl under it at the same time, his only hope of exit lay there, as well as his only means of surviving the inroad of smoke which was fast becoming unendurable. He would break the sash and seek escape that way. They had doomed him to death, but he could climb roofs like a cat and feared nothing when once relieved from this smoke. Catching up the chair, he advanced toward the window.

But before reaching it he paused. It was not only he they sought to destroy, but the room. There was evidence of crime in the room. In that moment of keenly aroused intelligence he felt sure of it. What was to be done? How could he save the room, and, by these means, save himself and her? A single glance about assured him that he could not save it. The boards under his feet were hot. Glints of yellow light streaking through the shutters showed that the lower story had already burst into flame. The room must go and with it every clue to the problem which was agitating him. Meanwhile, his eyeballs were smarting, his head growing dizzy. No longer sure of his feet, he staggered over to the wall and was about to make use of its support in his effort to reach the window, when his eyes fell on the spot from which he had peeled the paper, and he came to a sudden standstill. A bit of pink was showing under one edge of the blue.

Dropping the chair which he still held, he fumbled for his knife, found it, made a dash at that wall, and for a few frenzied moments worked at the plaster till he had hacked off a piece which he thrust into his pocket. Then seizing the chair again, he made for the window and threw it with all his force against the panes. They crashed and the air came rushing in, reviving him enough for the second attempt. This not only smashed the pane, but loosened the shutters, and in one instant two sights burst upon his view —the face of a man in an upper window of the adjoining barn and the sudden swooping up from below of a column of deadly smoke which seemed to cut off all hope of his saving himself by the means he had calculated on. Yet no other way offered. It would be folly to try the door again. This was the only road, threatening as it looked, to possible safety for himself and her. He would take it, and if he succumbed in the effort, it should be with a final thought of her who was fast becoming an integral part of his own being.

Meanwhile he had mounted to the sill and taken another outward look. This room, as I have already intimated, was in the rear of an extension running back from the center of the main building. It consisted of only two stories, surmounted by a long, slightly-peaked roof. As the ceilings

were low in this portion of the house, the gutter of this roof was very near the top of the window. To reach it was not a difficult feat for one of his strength and agility, and if only the smoke would blow aside—Ah, it is doing so! A sudden change of wind had come to his rescue, and for the moment the way is clear for him to work himself out and up on to the ledge above. But once there, horror makes him weak again. A window, high up in the main building overlooking the extension, had come in sight, and in it sways a frantic woman ready to throw herself out. She screamed as he measured with his eye the height of that window from the sloping roof and thence to the ground, and he recognized the voice. It was the same he had heard before, but it was not *hers*. She would not be up so high, besides the shape and attitude, shown fitfully by the light of the now leaping flames, were those of a heavier, and less-refined woman. It was one of the maids—it was *the* maid Huldah, the one from whom he had hoped to win some light on this affair. Was she locked in, too? Her frenzy and mad looking behind and below her seemed to argue that she was. What deviltry! and, ah! what a confession of guilt on the part of the vile man who had planned this abominable end for the two persons whose evidence he dreaded. Helpless with horror, he became a man again in his indignation. Such villainy should not succeed. He would fight not only for his own life, but for this woman's. Miss Demarest was doubtless safe. Yet he wished he were sure of it; he could work with so much better heart. Her window was not visible from where he crouched. It was on the other side of the house. If she screamed, he would not be able to hear her. He must trust her to Providence. But his dream! his dream! The power of it was still upon him; a forerunner of fate, a picture possibly of her doom. The hestitation which this awful thought caused him warned him that not in this way could he make himself effective. The woman he saw stood in need of his help, and to her he must make his way. The bustle which now took place in the yards beneath, the sudden shouts and the hurried throwing up of windows all over the house showed that the alarm had now become general. Another moment, and the appalling cry—the most appalling

which leaves human lips—of fire! fire! rang from end to end of the threatened building. It was followed by women's shrieks and men's curses and then—by flames.

"She will hear, she will wake now," he thought, with his whole heart pulling him her way. But he did not desist from his intention to drop his eyes from the distraught figure entrapped between a locked door and a fall of thirty feet. He could reach her if he kept his nerve. A slow but steady hitch along the gutter was bringing him nearer every instant. Would she see him and take courage? No! her eyes were on the flames which were so bright now that he could actually see them glassed in her eyeballs. Would a shout attract her? The air was full of cries as the yards filled with escaping figures, but he would attempt it at the first lull—now—while her head was turned his way. Did she hear him? Yes. She is looking at him.

"Don't jump," he cried. "Tie your sheet to the bed-post. Tie it strong and fasten the other one to it and throw down the end. I will be here to catch it. Then you must come down hand over hand."

She threw up her arms, staring down at him in mortal terror; then, as the whole air grew lurid, nodded and tottered back. With incredible anxiety he watched for her reappearance. His post was becoming perilous. The fire had not yet reached the roof, but it was rapidly undermining its supports, and the heat was unendurable. Would he have to jump to the ground in his own despite? Was it his duty to wait for this girl, possibly already overcome by her fears and lying insensible? Yes; so long as he could hold out against the heat, it was his duty, but—Ah! what was that? Some one was shouting to him. He had been seen at last, and men, half-clad but eager, were rushing up the yard with a ladder. He could see their faces. How they glared in the red light. Help and determination were there, and perhaps when she saw the promise of this support, it would give nerve to her fingers and—

But it was not to be. As he watched their eager approach, he saw them stop, look back, swerve and rush around the corner of the house. Some one had directed them elsewhere. He could see the pointing hand, the baleful face. Quimby

had realized his own danger in this prospect of Hammersmith's escape, and had intervened to prevent it. It was a murderer's natural impulse, and did not surprise him, but it added another element of danger to his position, and if this woman delayed much longer—but she is coming; a blanket is thrown out, then a dangling end of cloth appears above the sill. It descends. Another moment he has crawled up the roof to the ridge and grasped it.

"Slowly now!" he shouts. "Take time and hold on tight. I will guide you." He feels the frail support stiffen. She has drawn it into her hands; now she is on the sill, and is working herself off. He clutched his end firmly, steadying himself as best he might by bestriding the ridge of the roof. The strain becomes greater, he feels her weight, she is slipping down, down. Her hands strike a knot; the jerk almost throws him off his balance. He utters a word of caution, lost in the growing roar of the flames whose hungry tongues have begun to leap above the gutter. She looks down, sees the approaching peril, and hastens her descent. He is all astrain, with heart and hand nerved for the awful possibilities of the coming moments when—ping! Something goes whistling by his ear, which for the instant sets his hair bristling on his head, and almost paralyzes every muscle. A bullet! The flame is not threatening enough! Some one is shooting at him from the dark.

IV

Well! death which comes one way cannot come another, and a bullet is more merciful than flame. The thought steadies Hammersmith; besides he has nothing to do with what is taking place behind his back. His duty is here, to guide and support this rapidly descending figure now almost with his reach. And he fulfills this duty, though that deadly "ping" is followed by another, and his starting eyes behold the hole made by the missile in the clapboard just before him.

She is down. They stand toppling together on the slippery ridge with no support but the rapidly heating wall down

which she had come. He looks one way, then another. Ten feet either way to the gutter! On one side leap the flames; beneath the other crouches their secret enemy. They cannot meet the first and live; needs must they face the latter. Bullets do not always strike the mark, as witness the two they had escaped. Besides, there are friends as well as enemies in the yard on this side. He can hear their encouraging cries. He will toss down the blanket; perhaps there will be hands to hold it and so break her fall, if not his.

With a courage which drew strength from her weakness, he carried out this plan and saw her land in safety amid half a dozen upstretched arms. Then he prepared to follow her, but felt his courage fail and his strength ooze without knowing the cause. Had a bullet struck him? He did not feel it. He was conscious of the heat, but of no other suffering; yet his limbs lacked life, and it no longer seemed possible for him to twist himself about so as to fall easily from the gutter.

"Come on! Come on!" rose in yells from below, but there was no movement in him.

"We can't wait. The wall will fall," rose affrightedly from below. But he simply clung and the doom of flame and collapsing timbers was rushing mercilessly upon him when, in the glare which lit up the whole dreadful scenery, there rose before his fainting eyes the sight of Miss Demarest's face turned his way from the crowd below, with all the terror of a woman's bleeding heart behind it. The joy which this recognition brought cleared his brain and gave him strength to struggle with his lethargy. Raising himself on one elbow, he slid his feet over the gutter, and with a frantic catch at its frail support, hung for one instant suspended, then dropped softly into the blanket which a dozen eager hands held out for him.

As he did so, a single gasping cry went up from the hushed throng. He knew the voice. His rescue had relieved one heart. His own beat tumultuously and the blood throbbed in his veins as he realized this.

The next thing he remembered was standing far from the collapsing building, with a dozen men and boys grouped about him. A woman at his feet was clasping his knees in thankfulness, another sinking in a faint at the edge of the

shadow, but he saw neither, for the blood was streaming over his eyes from a wound not yet accounted for, and as he felt the burning flow, he realized a fresh duty.

"Where is Quimby?" he demanded loudly. "He made this hole in my forehead. He's a murderer and a thief, and I order you all in the name of the law to assist me in arresting him."

With the confused cry of many voices, the circle widened. Brushing the blood from his brow, he caught at the nearest man, and with one glance toward the tottering building, pointed to the wall where he and the girl Huldah had clung.

"Look!" he shouted, "do you see that black spot? Wait till the smoke blows aside. There! now! the spot just below the dangling sheet. It's a bullet-hole. It was made while I crouched there. Quimby held the gun. He had his reasons for hindering our escape. The girl can tell you—"

"Yes, yes," rose up from the ground at his feet. "Quimby is a wicked man. He knew that I knew it and he locked my door when he saw the flames coming. I'm willing to tell now. I was afraid before."

They stared at her with all the wonder of uncomprehending minds as she rose with a resolute air to confront them; but as the full meaning of her words penetrated their benumbed brains, slowly, man by man, they crept away to peer about in the barns, and among the clustering shadows for the man who had been thus denounced. Hammersmith followed them, and for a few minutes nothing but chase was in any man's mind. That part of the building in which lay hidden the room of shadows shook, tottered, and fell, loading the heavens with sparks and lighting up the pursuit now become as wild and reckless as the scene itself. To Miss Demarest's eyes, just struggling back to sight and hearing from the nethermost depths of unconsciousness, it looked like the swirling flight of spirits lost in the vortex of hell. For one wild moment she thought that she herself had passed the gates of life and was one of those unhappy souls whirling over a gulf of flame. The next moment she realized her mistake. A kindly voice was in her ear, a kindly hand was pressing a half-burned blanket about her.

"Don't stare so," the voice said. "It is only people routing out Quimby. They say he set fire to the tavern himself, to hide his crime and do away with the one man who knew about it. I know that he locked me in because I—Oh, see! they've got him! they've got him! and with a gun in his hand!"

The friendly hand fell; both women started upright panting with terror and excitement. Then one of them drew back, crying in a tone of sudden anguish, "Why, no! It's Jake, Jake!"

Daybreak! and with it Doctor Golden, who at the first alarm had ridden out post-haste without waiting to collect his jury. As he stepped to the ground before the hollow shell and smoking pile which were all that remained to mark the scene of yesterday's events, he looked about among the half-clad, shivering men and women peering from the barns and stables where they had taken refuge, till his eyes rested on Hammersmith standing like a sentinel before one of the doors.

"What's this? what's this?" he cried, as the other quickly approached. "Fire, with a man like you in the house?"

"Fire because I was in the house. They evidently felt obliged to get rid of me somehow. It's been a night of great experiences for me. When they found I was not likely to perish in the flames they resorted to shooting. I believe that my forehead shows where one bullet passed. Jake's aim might be improved. Not that I am anxious for it."

"Jake? Do you mean the clerk? Did he fire at you?"

"Yes, while I was on the roof engaged in rescuing one of the women."

"The miserable cur! You arrested him, of course, as soon as you could lay your hands on him?"

"Yes. He's back of me in this outhouse."

"And Quimby? What about Quimby?"

"He's missing."

"And Mrs. Quimby?"

"Missing, too. They are the only persons unaccounted for."

"Lost in the fire?"

"We don't think so. He was the incendiary and she, undoubtedly, his accomplice. They would certainly look out for themselves. Doctor Golden, it was not for insurance money they fired the place; it was to cover up a crime."

The coroner, more or less prepared for this statement by what Hammersmith had already told him, showed but little additional excitement as he dubiously remarked:

"So you still hold to that idea."

Hammersmith glanced about him and, catching more than one curious eye turned their way from the crowd now rapidly collecting in all directions, drew the coroner aside and in a few graphic words related the night's occurrences and the conclusions these had forced upon him. Doctor Golden listened and seemed impressed at last, especially by one point.

"You saw Quimby," he repeated; "saw his face distinctly looking toward your room from one of the stable windows?"

"I can swear to it. I even caught his expression. It was malignant in the extreme, quite unlike that he usually turns upon his guests."

"Which window was it?"

Hammersmith pointed it out.

"You have been there? Searched the room and the stable?"

"Thoroughly, just as soon as it was light enough to see."

"And found—"

"Nothing; not even a clue."

"The man is lying dead in that heap. She, too, perhaps. We'll have to put the screws on Jake. A conspiracy like this must be unearthed. Show me the rascal."

"He's in a most careless mood. *He* doesn't think his master and mistress perished in the fire."

"Careless, eh? Well, we'll see. I know that sort."

But when a few minutes later he came to confront the clerk he saw that his task was not likely to prove quite so easy as his former experience had led him to expect. Save for a slight nervous trembling of limb and shoulder—surely not unnatural after such a night—Jake bore himself with very much the same indifferent ease he had shown the day before.

Doctor Golden surveyed him with becoming sternness.

"At what time did this fire start?" he asked.

Jake had a harsh voice, but he mellowed it wonderfully as he replied:

"Somewhere about one. I don't carry a watch, so I don't know the exact time."

"The exact time isn't necessary. Near one answers well enough. How came you to be completely dressed at near one in a country tavern like this?"

"I was on watch. There was death in the house."

"Then you were in the house?"

"Yes." His tongue faltered, but not his gaze; that was as direct as ever. "I was in the house, but not at the moment the fire started. I had gone to the stable to get a newspaper. My room is in the stable, the little one high in the cock-loft. I did not find the paper at once and when I did I stopped to read a few lines. I'm a slow reader, and by the time I was ready to cross back to the house, smoke was pouring out of the rear windows, and I stopped short, horrified! I'm mortally afraid of fire."

"You have shown it. I have not heard that you raised the least alarm."

"I'm afraid you're right. I lost my head like a fool. You see, I've never lived anywhere else for the last ten years, and to see my home on fire was more than I could stand. You wouldn't think me so weak to look at these muscles."

Baring his arm, he stared down at it with a forlorn shake of his head. The coroner glanced at Hammersmith. What sort of fellow was this! A giant with the air of a child, a rascal with the smile of a humorist. Delicate business, this; or were they both deceived and the man just a good-humored silly?

Hammersmith answered the appeal by a nod toward an inner door. The coroner understood and turned back to Jake with the seemingly irrelevant inquiry:

"Where did you leave Mr. Quimby when you went to the cock-loft?"

"In the house."

"Asleep?"

"No, he was making up his accounts."

"In the office?"

"Yes."

"And that was where you left him?"

"Yes, it was."

"Then, how came he to be looking out of your window just before the fire broke out?"

"He?" Jake's jaw fell and his enormous shoulders drooped; but only for a moment. With something between a hitch and a shrug, he drew himself upright and with some slight display of temper cried out, "Who says he was there?"

The coroner answered him. "The man behind you. He saw him."

Jake's hand closed in a nervous grip. Had the trigger been against his finger at that moment it would doubtless have been snapped with some satisfaction, so the barrel had been pointing at Hammersmith.

"Saw him distinctly," the coroner repeated. "Mr. Quimby's face is not to be mistaken."

"If he saw him," retorted Jake, with unexpected cunning, "then the flames had got a start. One don't see in the dark. They hadn't got much of a start when I left. So he must have gone up to my room after I came down."

"It was before the alarm was given; before Mr. Hammersmith here had crawled out of his room window."

"I can't help that, sir. It was after I left the stable. You can't mix me up with Quimby's doings."

"Can't we? Jake, you're no lawyer and you don't know how to manage a lie. Make a clean breast of it. It may help you and it won't hurt Quimby. Begin with the old lady's coming. What turned Quimby against her? What's the plot?"

"I don't know of any plot. What Quimby told you is true. You needn't expect me to contradict it!"

A leaden doggedness had taken the place of his whilom good nature. Nothing is more difficult to contend with. Nothing is more dreaded by the inquisitor. Hammersmith realized the difficulties of the situation and repeated the gesture he had previously made toward the door leading into an adjoining compartment. The coroner nodded as before and changed the tone of his inquiry.

"Jake," he declared, "you are in a more serious position than you realize. You may be devoted to Quimby, but there

are others who are not. A night such as you have been through quickens the conscience of women if it does not that of men. One has been near death. The story of such a woman is apt to be truthful. Do you want to hear it? I have no objections to your doing so."

"What story? I don't know of any story. Women have easy tongues; they talk even when they have nothing to say."

"This woman has something to say, or why should she have asked to be confronted with you? Have her in, Mr. Hammersmith. I imagine that a sight of this man will make her voluble."

A sneer from Jake; but when Hammersmith, crossing to the door I've just mentioned, opened it and let in Huldah, this token of bravado gave way to a very different expression and he exclaimed half ironically, half caressingly:

"Why, she's my sweetheart! What can she have to say except that she was mighty fortunate not to have been burned up in the fire last night?"

Doctor Golden and the detective crossed looks in some anxiety. They had not been told of this relation between the two, either by the girl herself or by the others. Gifted with a mighty close mouth, she had nevertheless confided to Hammersmith that she could tell things and would, if he brought her face to face with the man who tried to shoot him while he was helping her down from the roof. Would her indignation hold out under the insinuating smile with which the artful rascal awaited her words? It gave every evidence of doing so, for her eye flashed threateningly and her whole body showed the tension of extreme feeling as she came hastily forward, and pausing just beyond the reach of his arm, cried out:

"You had a hand in locking me in. You're tired of me. If you're not, why did you fire those bullets my way? I was escaping and—"

Jake thrust in a quick word. "That was Quimby's move —locking your door. He had some game up. I don't know what it was. I had nothing to do with it."

This denial seemed to influence her. She looked at him and her breast heaved. He was good to look at; he must have been more than that to one of her restricted experience.

Hammersmith trembled for the success of their venture. Would this blond young giant's sturdy figure and provoking smile prevail against the good sense which must tell her that he was criminal to the core, and that neither his principle nor his love were to be depended on? No, not yet. With a deepening flush, she flashed out:

"You hadn't? You didn't want me dead? Why, then, those bullets? You might have killed me as well as Mr. Hammersmith when you fired!"

"Huldah!" Astonishment and reproach in the tone and something more than either in the look which accompanied it. Both were very artful and betrayed resources not to be expected from one of his ordinarily careless and good-humored aspect. "You haven't heard what I've said about that?"

"What could you say?"

"Why, the truth, Huldah. I saw you on the roof. The fire was near. I thought that neither you nor the man helping you could escape. A death of that kind is horrible. I loved you too well to see you suffer. My gun was behind the barn door. I got it and fired out of mercy."

She gasped. So, in a way, did the two officials. The plea was so specious, and its likely effect upon her so evident.

"Jake, can I believe you?" she murmured.

For answer, he fumbled in his pocket and drew out a small object which he held up before her between his fat fore-finger and thumb. It was a ring, a thin, plain hoop of gold worth possibly a couple of dollars, but which in her eyes seemed to possess an incalculable value, for she had no sooner seen it than her whole face flushed and a look of positive delight supplanted the passionately aggrieved one with which she had hitherto faced him.

"You had bought *that?*"

He smiled and returned it to his pocket.

"For you," he simply said.

The joy and pride with which she regarded him, despite the protesting murmur of the discomfited Hammersmith, proved that the wily Jake had been too much for them.

"You see!" This to Hammersmith. "Jake didn't mean any harm, only kindness to us both. If you will let him go,

I'll be more thankful than when you helped me down off the roof. We're wanting to be married. Didn't you see him show me the ring?"

It was for the coroner to answer.

"We'll let him go when we're assured that he means all that he says. I haven't as good an opinion of him as you have. I think he's deceiving you and that you are a very foolish girl to trust him. Men don't fire on the women they love, for any reason. You'd better tell me what you have against him."

"I haven't anything against him now."

"But you were going to tell us something—"

"I guess I was fooling."

"People are not apt to fool who have just been in terror of their lives."

Her eyes sought the ground. "I'm just a hard-working girl," she muttered almost sullenly. "What should I know about that man Quimby's dreadful doings?"

"Dreadful? You call them dreadful?" It was Doctor Golden who spoke.

"He locked me in my room," she violently declared. "That wasn't done for fun."

"And is that all you can tell us? Don't look at Jake. Look at me."

"But I don't know what to say. I don't even know what you want."

"I'll tell you. Your work in the house has been upstairs work, hasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I did up the rooms—some of them," she added cautiously.

"What rooms? Front rooms, rear rooms, or both?"

"Rooms in front; those on the third floor."

"But you sometimes went into the extension?"

"I've been down the hall."

"Haven't you been in any of the rooms there,—Number 3, for instance?"

"No, sir; my work didn't take me there."

"But you've heard of the room?"

"Yes, sir. The girls sometimes spoke of it. It had a bad name, and wasn't often used. No girl liked to go there. A

man was found dead in it once. They said he killed his own self."

"Have you ever heard any one describe this room?"

"No, sir."

"Tell what paper was on the wall?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps Jake here can help us. He's been in the room often."

"The paper was blue; you know that; you saw it yourselves yesterday," blurted forth the man thus appealed to.

"Always blue? Never any other color that you remember?"

"No; but I've been in the house only ten years."

"Oh, is that all! And do you mean to say that this room has not been redecorated in ten years?"

"How can I tell? I can't remember every time a room is repapered."

"You ought to remember this one."

"Why?"

"Because of a very curious circumstance connected with it."

"I don't know of any circumstance."

"You heard what Miss Demarest had to say about a room whose walls were covered with muddy pink scrolls."

"Oh, she!" His shrug was very expressive. Huldah continued to look down.

"Miss Demarest seemed to know what she was talking about," pursued the coroner in direct contradiction of the tone he had taken the day before. "Her description was quite vivid. It would be strange now if those walls had once been covered with just such paper as she described."

An ironic stare, followed by an incredulous smile from Jake; dead silence and immobility on the part of Huldah.

"Was it?" shot from Doctor Golden's lips with all the vehemence of conscious authority.

There was an instant's pause, during which Huldah's breast ceased its regular rise and fall; then the clerk laughed sharply and cried with the apparent lightness of a happy-go-lucky temperament:

"I should like to know if it was. I'd think it a very

curious quin—quin— What's the word? quincedence, or something like that."

"The deepest fellow I know," grumbled the baffled coroner into Hammersmith's ear, as the latter stepped his way, "or just the most simple." Then added aloud: "Lift up my coat there, please."

Hammersmith did so. The garment mentioned lay across a small table which formed the sole furnishing of the place, and when Hammersmith raised it, there appeared lying underneath several small pieces of plaster which Doctor Golden immediately pointed out to Jake.

"Do you see these bits from a papered wall?" he asked. "They were torn from that of Number 3, between the breaking out of the fire and Mr. Hammersmith's escape from the room. Come closer; you may look at them, but keep your fingers off. You see that the coincidence you mentioned holds."

Jake laughed again loudly, in a way he probably meant to express derision; then he stood silent, gazing curiously down at the pieces before him. The blue paper peeling away from the pink made it impossible for him to deny that just such paper as Miss Demarest described had been on the wall prior to the one they had all seen and remembered.*

"Well, I vum!" Jake finally broke out, turning and looking from one face to another with a very obvious attempt to carry off the matter jovially. "She must have a great eye; a—a—(another hard word! What is it now?) Well! no matter. One of the kind what sees through the outside of things to what's underneath. I always thought her queer, but not so queer as that. I'd like to have that sort of power myself. Wouldn't you, Huldah?"

The girl, whose eye, as Hammersmith was careful to note, had hardly dwelt for an instant on these bits, not so long by any means as a woman's natural curiosity would seem to prompt, started as attention was thus drawn to herself and attempted a sickly smile.

* Hammersmith's first attempt to settle this fact must have failed from his having chosen a spot for his experiment where the old paper had been stripped away before the new was put on.

But the coroner had small appreciation for this attempted display of humor, and motioning to Hammersmith to take her away, he subjected the clerk to a second examination which, though much more searching and rigorous than the first, resulted in the single discovery that for all his specious love-making he cared no more for the girl than for one of his old hats. This the coroner confided to Hammersmith when he came in looking disconsolate at his own failure to elicit anything further from the resolute Huldah.

"But you can't make her believe that now," whispered Hammersmith.

"Then we must trick him into showing her his real feelings."

"How would you set to work? He's warned, she's warned, and life if not love is at stake."

"It don't look very promising," muttered Doctor Golden, "but—"

He was interrupted by a sudden sound of hubbub without.

"It's Quimby, Quimby!" declared Hammersmith in his sudden excitement.

But again he was mistaken. It was not the landlord, but his wife, wild-eyed, disheveled, with bits of straw in her hair from some sheltering hayrick and in her hand a heavy gold chain which, as the morning sun shone across it, showed sparkles of liquid clearness at short intervals along its whole length.

Diamonds! Miss Thistlewaite's diamonds, and the woman who held them was gibbering like an idiot!

The effect on Jake was remarkable. Uttering a piteous cry, he bounded from their hands and fell at the woman's feet.

"Mother Quimby!" he moaned. "Mother Quimby!" and sought to kiss her hand and wake some intelligence in her eye.

Meanwhile the coroner and Hammersmith looked on, astonished at these evidences of real feeling. Then their eyes stole behind them, and simultaneously both started back for the outhouse they had just left. Huldah was standing in the doorway, surveying the group before her with trembling, half-parted lips.

"Jealous!" muttered Hammersmith. "Providence has done our little trick for us. She will talk now. Look! She's beckoning to us."

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"Speak quickly. You'll never regret it, Huldah. He's no mate for you, and you ought to know it. You have seen this paper covered with the pink scrolls before?"

The coroner had again drawn aside his coat from the bits of plaster.

"Yes," she gasped, with quick glances at her lover through the open doorway. "He never shed tears for me!" she exclaimed bitterly. "I didn't know he could for anybody. Oh, I'll tell what I've kept quiet here," and she struck her breast violently. "I wouldn't keep the truth back now if the minister was waiting to marry us. He loves that old woman and he doesn't love me. Hear him call her 'mother.' Are mothers dearer than sweethearts? Oh, I'll tell! I don't know anything about the old lady, but I do know that room 3 was repapered the night before last, and secretly, by him. I didn't see him do it, nobody did, but this is how I know: Some weeks ago I was hunting for something in the attic, when I stumbled upon some rolls of old wall paper lying in a little cubby-hole under the eaves. The end of one of the rolls was torn and lay across the floor. I couldn't help seeing it or remembering its color. It was like this, blue and striped. Exactly like it," she repeated, "just as shabby and old-looking. The rain had poured in on it, and it was all moldy and stained. It smelt musty. I didn't give two thoughts to it then, but when after the old lady's death I heard one of the girls say something in the kitchen about a room being blue now which only a little while ago was pink, I stole up into the attic to see if those rolls were still there and found them every one gone. Oh, what is happening now?"

"One of the men is trying to take the diamonds from the woman and she won't let him. Her wits are evidently gone —frightened away by the horrors of the night—or she wouldn't try to cling to what has branded her at once as a thief."

The word seemed to pierce the girl. She stared out at her former mistress, who was again being soothed by the clerk, and murmured hoarsely:

"A thief! and he don't seem to mind, but is just as good to her! Oh, oh, I once served a term myself for—for a smaller thing than that and I thought that was why— Oh, sir, oh, sir, there's no mistake about the paper. For I went looking about in the barrels and where they throw the refuse, for bits to prove that this papering had been done in the night. It seemed so wonderful to me that any one, even Jake, who is the smartest man you ever saw, could do such a job as that and no one know. And though I found nothing in the barrels, I did in the laundry stove. It was full of burned paper, and some of it showed color, and it was just that musty old blue I had seen in the attic."

She paused with a terrified gasp; Jake was looking at her from the open door.

"Oh, Jake!" she wailed out, "why weren't you true to me? Why did you pretend to love me when you didn't?"

He gave her a look, then turned on his heel. He was very much subdued in aspect and did not think to brush away the tear still glistening on his cheek.

"I've said my last word to *you,*" he quietly declared, then stood silent a moment, with slowly laboring chest and an air of deepest gloom. But, as his eye stole outside again, they saw the spirit melt within him and simple human grief take the place of icy resolution. "She was like a mother to me," he murmured. "And now they say she'll never be herself again as long as she lives." Suddenly his head rose and he faced the coroner.

"You're right," said he. "It's all up with me. No home, no sweetheart, no missus. *She* [there was no doubt as to whom he meant by that tremulous *she*] was the only one I've ever cared for and she's just shown herself a thief. I'm no better. This is our story."

I will not give it in his words, but in my own. It will be shorter and possibly more intelligible.

The gang, if you may call it so, consisted of Quimby and these two, with a servant or so in addition. Robbery was its aim; a discreet and none too frequent spoliation of such

of their patrons as lent themselves to their schemes. Quimby was the head, his wife the soul of this business, and Jake their devoted tool. The undermining of the latter's character had been begun early; a very dangerous undermining, because it had for one of its elements good-humor and affectionate suggestion. At fourteen he was ready for any crime, but he was mercifully kept out of the worst till he was a full-grown man. Then he did his part. The affair of the old woman was an unpremeditated one. It happened in this wise: Miss Demarest's story had been true in every particular. Her mother *was* with her when she came to the house, and he, Jake, was the person sitting far back in the shadows at the time the young lady registered. There was nothing peculiar in the occurrence or in their behavior except the decided demand which Miss Demarest made for separate rooms. This attracted his attention, for the house was pretty full and only one room was available in the portion reserved for transients. What would Quimby do? He couldn't send two women away, and he was entirely too conciliatory and smooth to refuse a request made so peremptorily. Quimby did nothing. He hemmed, hawed, and looked about for his wife. She was in the inner office back of him, and, attracted by his uneasy movements, showed herself. A whispered consultation followed, during which she cast a glance Jake's way. He understood her instantly and lounged carelessly forward. "Let them have Number 3," he said. "It's all fixed for the night. I can sleep anywhere, on the settle here or even on the floor of the inner office."

He had whispered these words, for the offer meant more than appeared. Number 3 was never given to guests. It was little more than a closet and was not even furnished. A cot had been put in that very afternoon, but only to meet a special emergency. A long-impending conference was going to be held between him and his employers subsequent to closing up time, and he had planned this impromptu refuge to save himself a late walk to the stable. At his offer to pass the same over to the Demarests, the difficulty of the moment vanished. Miss Demarest was shown to the one empty room in front, and the mother—as being the one less

likely to be governed by superstitious fears if it so happened that some rumor of the undesirability of the haunted Number 3 should have reached them—to the small closet so hastily prepared for the clerk. Mrs. Quimby accompanied her, and afterward visited her again for the purpose of carrying her a bowl and some water. It was then she encountered Miss Demarest, who, anxious for a second and more affectionate good-night from her mother, had been wandering the halls in a search for her room. There was nothing to note in this simple occurrence, and Mrs. Quimby might have forgotten all about it if Miss Demarest had not made a certain remark on leaving the room. The bareness and inhospitable aspect of the place may have struck her, for she stopped in the doorway and, looking back, exclaimed: "What ugly paper! Magenta, too, the one color my mother hates." This Mrs. Quimby remembered, for she also hated magenta, and never went into this room if she could help it.

The business which kept them all up that night was one totally disconnected with the Demarests or any one else in the house. A large outstanding obligation was coming due which Quimby lacked the money to meet. Something must be done with the stolen notes and jewelry which they had accumulated in times past and had never found the will or courage to dispose of. A choice must be made of what was salable. But what choice? It was a question that opened the door to endless controversy and possibly to a great difference of opinion; for in his way Quimby was a miser of the worst type and cared less for what money would do than for the sight and feeling of the money itself, while Mrs. Quimby was even more tenacious in her passion for the trinkets and gems which she looked upon as her part of the booty. Jake, on the contrary, cared little for anything but the good of the couple to whom he had attached himself. He wished Quimby to be satisfied, but not at Mrs. Quimby's expense. He was really fond of the woman and he was resolved that she should have no cause to grieve, even if he had to break with the old man. Little did any of them foresee what the night really held for them, or on what a jagged and unsuspected rock their frail bark was about to split.

Shutting-up time came, and with it the usual midnight

quiet. All the doors had been locked and the curtains drawn over the windows and across the glass doors of the office. They were determined to do what they had never done before, lay out the loot and make a division. Quimby was resolved to see the diamonds which his wife had kept hidden for so long, and she, the securities, concerning the value of which he had contradicted himself so often. Jake's presence would keep the peace; they had no reason to fear any undue urging of his claims. All this he knew, and he was not therefore surprised, only greatly excited, when, after a last quiet look and some listening at the foot of the stairs, Mr. Quimby beckoned him into the office and, telling him to lock the door behind him, stepped around the bar to summon his wife. Jake never knew how it happened. He flung the door to and locked it, as he thought, but he must have turned the key too quickly, for the bolt of the lock did not enter the jamb, as they afterward found. Meanwhile they felt perfectly secure. The jewels were brought out of Mrs. Quimby's bedroom and laid on the desk. The securities were soon laid beside them. They had been concealed behind a movable brick at the side of the fireplace. Then the discussion began, involving more or less heat and excitement.

How long this lasted no one ever knew. At half-past eleven no change of attitude had taken place either in Quimby or his wife. At twelve the only difference marked by Jake was the removal of the securities to Quimby's breast pocket, and of the diamond-studded chain to Mrs. Quimby's neck. The former were too large for the pocket, the latter too brilliant for the dark calico background they blazed against. Jake, who was no fool, noted both facts, but had no words for the situation. He was absorbed, and he saw that Quimby was absorbed, in watching her broad hand creeping over those diamonds and huddling them up in a burning heap against her heart. There was fear in the action, fierce and overmastering fear, and so there was in her eyes which, fixed and glassy, stared over their shoulders at the wall behind, as though something had reached out from that wall and struck at the very root of her being. What did it mean? There was nothing in the room to affright her. Had she gone daft? Or—

Suddenly they both felt the blood congeal in their own veins; each turned to each a horrified face, then slowly and as if drawn by a power supernatural and quite outside of their own will, their two heads turned in the direction she was looking, and they beheld standing in their midst a sceptre—no, it was the figure of a living, breathing woman, with eyes fastened on those jewels,—those well-known, much-advertised jewels! So much they saw in that instant flash, then nothing! For Quimby, in a frenzy of unreasoning fear, had taken the chair from under him and had swung it at the figure. A lamp had stood on the bar top. It was caught by the backward swing of the chair, overturned and quenched. The splintering of glass mingled its small sound with an ominous thud in the thick darkness. It was the end of all things; the falling of an impenetrable curtain over a horror half sensed, yet all the greater for its mystery.

The silence—the terror—the unspeakable sense of doom which gripped them all was not broken by a heart-beat. All listened for a stir, a movement where they could see nothing. But the stillness remained unbroken. The silence was absolute. The figure which they had believed themselves to have seen had been a dream, an imagination of their overwrought minds. It could not be otherwise. The door had been locked, entrance was impossible; yet doubt held them powerless. The moments were making years of themselves. To each came in a flash a review of every earthly incident they had experienced, every wicked deed, every unholy aspiration. Quimby gritted his teeth. It was the first sound which had followed that thud and, slight as it was, it released them somewhat from their awful tension. Jake felt that he could move now, and was about to let forth his imprisoned breath when he felt the touch of icy fingers trailing over his cheek, and started back with a curse. It was Mrs. Quimby feeling about for him in the impenetrable darkness, and in another moment he could hear her smothered whisper:

"Are you there, Jake?"

"Yes; where are you?"

"Here," said the woman, with an effort to keep her teeth from striking together.

"For God's sake, a light!" came from the hollow darkness beyond.

It was Quimby's voice at last. Jake answered:

"No light for me. I'll stay where I am till daybreak."

"Get a light, you fool!" commanded Quimby, but not without a tremble in his usually mild tone.

Hard breathing from Jake, but no other response. Quimby seemed to take a step nearer, for his voice was almost at their ears now.

"Jake, you can have anything I've got so as you get a light now."

"There ain't nothing to light here. You broke the lamp."

Quiet for a moment, then Quimby muttered hoarsely:

"If you ain't scared out of your seven senses, you can go down cellar and bring up that bit of candle 'longside the ale-barrels."

Into the cellar! Not Jake. The moving of the rickety table which his fat hand had found and rested on spoke for him.

Another curse from Quimby. Then the woman, though with some hesitation, said with more self-control than could be expected:

"I'll get it," and they heard her move away from *it* toward the trap-door behind the bar.

The two men made no objection. To her that cold, black cellar might seem a refuge from the unseen horror centered here. It had not struck them so. It had its own possibilities, and Jake wondered at her courage, as he caught the sound of her groping advance and the sudden clatter and clink of bottles as the door came up and struck the edge of the bar. There was life and a suggestion of home in that clatter and clink, and all breathed easier for a moment, but only for a moment. The something lying there behind them, or was it almost under their feet, soon got its hold again upon their fears, and Jake found himself standing stock-still, listening both ways for that dreaded, or would it be welcome, movement on the floor behind, and to the dragging sound of Mrs. Quimby's skirt and petticoat as she made her first step down those cellar-stairs. What an endless time it took! He could rush down there in a minute, but she—she could not have

reached the third step yet, for that always creaked. Now it did creak. Then there was no sound for some time, unless it was the panting of Quimby's breath somewhere over by the bar. Then the stair creaked again. She must be nearly up.

"Here's matches and the candle," came in a hollow voice from the trap-stairs.

A faint streak appeared for an instant against the dark, then disappeared. Another; but no lasting light. The matches were too damp to burn.

"Jake, ain't you got a match?" appealed the voice of Quimby in half-choked accents.

After a bit of fumbling a small blaze shot up from where Jake stood. Its sulphurous smell may have suggested to all, as it did to one, the immeasurable distance of heaven at that moment, and the awful nearness of hell. They could see now, but not one of them looked in the direction where all their thoughts lay. Instead of that, they rolled their eyes on each other, while the match burned slowly out; Mrs. Quimby from the trap, her husband from the bar, and Jake. Suddenly he found words, and his cry rang through the room:

"The candle! the candle! this is my only match. Where is the candle?"

Quimby leaped forward and with shaking hand held the worn bit of candle to the flame. It failed to ignite. The horrible, dreaded darkness was about to close upon them again before—before— But another hand had seized the candle. Mrs. Quimby has come forward, and as the match sends up its last flicker, thrusts the wick against the flame and the candle flares up. It is lighted.

Over it they give each other one final appealing stare. There's no help for it now; they must look. Jake's head turned first, then Mrs. Quimby, and then that of the real aggressor.

A simultaneous gasp from them all betrays the worst. It had been no phantom called into being by their overtaxed nerves. A woman lay before them, face downward on the hard floor. A woman dressed in black, with hat on head and a little satchel clutched in one stiff, outstretched hand. Miss

Demarest's mother! The little old lady who had come into the place four hours before!

With a muttered execration, Jake stepped over to her side and endeavored to raise her; but he instantly desisted, and looking up at Quimby and his wife, moved his lips with the one fatal word which ends all hope:

"Dead!"

They listened appalled. "Dead?" echoed the now terrified Quimby.

"Dead?" repeated his no less agitated wife.

Jake was the least overcome of the three. With another glance at the motionless figure, he rose, and walking around the body, crossed to the door and seeing what he had done to make entrance possible, cursed himself and locked it properly. Meanwhile, Mrs. Quimby, with her eyes on her husband, had backed slowly away till she had reached the desk, against which she now stood with fierce and furious eyes, still clutching at her chain.

Quimby watched her fascinated. He had never seen her look like this before. What did it portend? They were soon to know.

"Coward!" fell from her lips, as she stared with unrelenting hate at her husband. "An old woman who was not even conscious of what she saw! I'll not stand for this killing, Jacob. You may count me out of this and the chain, too If you don't—" a threatening gesture finished the sentence and the two men looking at her knew that they had come up against a wall.

"Susan!" Was that Quimby speaking? "Susan, are you going back on me now?"

She pointed at the motionless figure lying in its shrouding black like an ineffaceable blot on the office floor, then at the securities showing above the edge of his pocket.

"Were we not close enough to discovery, without drawing the attention of the police by such an unnecessary murder? She was walking in her sleep. I remember her eyes as she advanced toward me; there was no sight in them."

"You lie!" It was the only word which Quimby found to ease the shock which this simple statement caused him. But Jake saw from the nature of the glance he shot at his

poor old victim that her words had struck home. His wife saw it, too, but it did not disturb the set line of her determined mouth.

"You'll let me keep the chain," she said, "and you'll use your wits, now that you have used your hand, to save yourself and myself from the charge of murder."

Quimby, who was a man of great intelligence when his faculties were undisturbed by anger or shock, knelt and turned his victim carefully over so that her face was uppermost.

"It was not murder," he uttered in an indescribable tone after a few minutes of cautious scrutiny. "The old lady fell and struck her forehead. See! the bruise is scarcely perceptible. Had she been younger—"

"A sudden death from any cause in this house at just this time is full of danger for us," coldly broke in his wife.

The landlord rose to his feet, walked away to the window, dropped his head, thought for a minute, and then slowly came back, glanced at the woman again, at her dress, her gloved hands, and her little satchel.

"She didn't die in this house," fell from his lips in his most oily accents. "She fell in the woods; the path is full of bared roots, and there she must be found to-morrow morning. Jake, are you up to the little game?"

Jake, who was drawing his first full breath, answered with a calm enough nod, whereupon Quimby bade his wife to take a look outside and see if the way was clear for them to carry the body out.

She did not move. He fell into a rage; an unusual thing for him.

"Bestir yourself! do as I bid you," he muttered.

Her eyes held his; her face took on the look he had learned to dread. Finally she spoke:

"And the daughter! What about the daughter?"

Quimby stood silent; then with a sidelong leer, and in a tone smooth as oil, but freighted with purpose, "The mother first; we'll look after the daughter later."

Mrs. Quimby shivered; then as her hand spread itself over the precious chain sparkling with the sinister gleam of serpent's eyes on her broad bosom, she grimly muttered:

"How? I'm for no more risks, I tell you."

Jake took a step forward. He thought his master was about to rush upon her. But he was only gathering up his faculties to meet the new problem she had flung at him.

"The girl's a mere child; we shall have no difficulty with her," he muttered broodingly. "Who saw these two come in?"

Then it came out that no one but themselves had been present at their arrival. Further consultation developed that the use to which Number 3 had been put was known to but one of the maids, who could easily be silenced. Whereupon Quimby told his scheme. Mrs. Quimby was satisfied, and he and Jake prepared to carry it out.

The sensations of the next half-hour, as told by Jake, would make your flesh creep. They did not dare to carry a lamp to light the gruesome task, and well as they knew the way, the possibilities of a stumble or a fall against some one of the many trees they had to pass filled them with constant terror. They did stumble once, and the low cry Jake uttered caused them new fears. Was that a window they heard flying up? No; but something moved in the bushes. They were sure of this and guiltily shook in their shoes; but nothing advanced out of the shadows, and they went on.

But the worst was when they had to turn their backs upon the body left lying face downward in the cold, damp woods. Men of no compassion, unreached by ordinary sympathies, they felt the furtive skulking back, step by step, along ways commonplace enough in the daytime, but begirt with terrors now and full of demoniac suggestion.

The sight of a single thread of light marking the door left ajar for them by Mrs. Quimby was a beacon of hope which was not even disturbed by the sight of her wild figure walking in a circle round and round the office, the stump of candle dripping unheeded over her fingers, and her eyes almost as sightless as those of the form left in the woods.

"Susan!" exclaimed her husband, laying hand on her.

She paused at once. The presence of the two men had restored her self-possession.

But all was not well yet. Jake drew Quimby's attention

to the register where the two names of mother and daughter could be seen in plain black and white.

"Oh, that's nothing!" exclaimed the landlord, and, taking out his knife, he ripped the leaf out, together with the corresponding one in the back. "The devil's on our side all right, or why did she pass over the space at the bottom of the page and write their two names at the top of the next one?"

He started, for his wife had clutched his arm.

"Yes, the devil's on our side thus far," said she, "but here he stops. I have just remembered something that will upset our whole plan and possibly hang us. Miss Demarest visited her mother in Number 3 and noticed the room well, and particularly the paper. Now if she is able to describe that paper, it might not be so easy for us to have our story believed."

For a minute all stood aghast, then Jake quietly remarked: "It is now one by the clock. If you can find me some of that old blue paper I once chucked under the eaves in the front attic, I will engage to have it on those four walls before daylight. Bring the raggedest rolls you can find. If it shouldn't be dry to the touch when they come to see it tomorrow, it must look so stained and old that no one will think of laying hand on it. I'll go make the paste."

As Jake was one of the quickest and most precise of workers at anything he understood, this astonishing offer struck the other two as quite feasible. The paper was procured, the furniture moved back, and a transformation made in the room in question which astonished even those concerned in it. Dawn rose upon the completed work and, the self-possession of all three having been restored with the burning up of such scraps as remained after the four walls were covered, they each went to their several beds for a half-hour of possible rest. Jake's was in Number 3. He has never said what that half-hour was to him!

The rest we know. The scheme did not fully succeed, owing to the interest awakened in one man's mind by the beauty and seeming truth of Miss Demarest. Investigation followed which roused the landlord to the danger threatening them from the curiosity of Hammersmith, and it being neck

or nothing with him, he planned the deeper crime of burning up room and occupant before further discoveries could be made. What became of him in the turmoil which followed, no one could tell, not even Jake. They had been together in Jake's room before the latter ran out with his gun, but beyond that the clerk knew nothing. Of Mrs. Quimby he could tell more. She had not been taken into their confidence regarding the fire, some small grains of humanity remaining in her which they feared might upset their scheme. She had only been given some pretext for locking Huldah in her room, and it was undoubtedly her horror at her own deed when she saw to what it had committed her which unsettled her brain and made her a gibbering idiot for life.

Or was it some secret knowledge of her husband's fate, unknown to others? We cannot tell, for no sign nor word of Jacob Quimby ever came to dispel the mystery of his disappearance.

And this is the story of Three Forks Tavern and the room numbered 3.

The Gray Lady

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

The Gray Lady

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

WAS it a spectre?

For days I could not answer this question. I am no believer in spiritual manifestations, yet—But let me tell my story.

I was lodging with my wife on the first floor of a house in Twenty-seventh Street. I had taken the apartments for three months, and we had already lived in them two and found them sufficiently comfortable. The back room we used as a bedroom, and as we received but few friends, the two great leaves of old mahogany connecting the rooms, usually stood wide open.

One morning, my wife being ill, I left her lying in bed and stepped into the parlor preparatory to going out for breakfast. It was late—nine o'clock probably—and I was hastening to leave, when I heard a sound behind me—or did I merely feel a presence?—and, turning, saw a strange and totally unknown woman coming toward me from my wife's room.

As I had just left that room, and as there was no other way of entrance save through a door we always kept locked, I was so overpowered by my astonishment that I never thought of speaking or moving until she had passed me. Then I found voice, and calling out "Madam!" endeavored to stop her.

But the madam, if madam she was, passed on as quietly, as mechanically even, as if I had not raised my voice, and before I could grasp the fact that she was melting from before me flitted through the hall to the front door and so out, leaving behind on the palm of my hand the "feel" of her wool dress, which I had just managed to touch.

Not understanding her or myself or the strange thrill

awakened by this contact, I tore open the front door and looked out, expecting, of course, to see her on the steps or on the sidewalk in front. But there was no one of her appearance visible, and I came back questioning whether I was the victim of a hallucination or just an everyday fool. To satisfy myself on this important question I looked about for the hallboy, with the intention of asking him if he had seen any such person go out, but that young and inconsequent scamp was missing from his post as usual and there was no one within sight to appeal to.

There was nothing to do but to re-enter my rooms, where my attention was immediately arrested by the sight of my wife sitting up in bed and surveying me with a look of unmistakable astonishment.

"Who was that woman?" she asked. "And how came she in here?"

So she had seen her too.

"What woman, Lydia? I have not let in any woman. Did you think there was a woman in this room?"

"Not in that room," she answered hoarsely, "but in this one. I saw her just now passing through the folding doors. Wilbur, I am frightened. See how my hands shake. Do you think I am sick enough to imagine things?"

I knew she was not, but I did not say so. I thought it would be bettter for her to think herself under some such delusion.

"You were dozing," said I. "If you had seen a woman here you could tell me how she looked."

"And I can," my wife broke in excitedly. "She was like the ghosts we read of, only that her dress and the veil or drapery she wore were all gray. Didn't you see her? You must have seen her. Shen went right by you—a gray woman, all gray; a lady, Wilbur, and slightly lame. Could I have dreamed all that?"

"You must have!" I protested, shaking the door leading directly into the hall so she might see it was locked, and even showing her the key to it lying in its accustomed place behind the bureau cushion. Yet I was in no satisfied condition myself, for she had described with the greatest accuracy the very person I had myself seen. Had we been alike the victims of a spiritual manifestation?

This was Tuesday. On Friday my question seemed to receive an answer. I had been downtown, as usual, and on returning found a crowd assembled in front of my lodging-house. A woman had been run over and was being carried into our rooms. In the glimpse I caught of her I saw that she was middle-aged and was wrapped in a long black cloak. Later this cloak fell off, as her hat had done long before, and I perceived that her dress was black and decent.

She was laid on our bed and every attention paid her. But she had been grievously injured about the head and gradually but surely sank before our eyes. Suddenly she roused and gave a look about her. It was a remarkable one —a look of recognition and almost of delight. Then she raised one hand and, pointing with a significant gesture into the empty space before her, sank back and died.

It was a sudden ending, and, anxious to see its effect upon my wife, who was standing on the other side of the bed, I glanced her way with some misgiving. She showed more feeling than I had anticipated. Indeed her countenance was a study, and when, under the influence of my scrutiny, she glanced my way, I saw that something of deeper import than this unexpected death in our rooms lay at the bottom of her uneasy look.

What that was I was soon to know, for catching up from amid the folds of the woman's gray-lined cloak a long gray veil which had fallen at the bedside, she disposed it softly about the woman's face, darting me a look full of significance.

"You remember the vision I had the morning when I was sick?" she whispered softly in my ear.

I nodded, secretly thrilled to my very heart's core.

"Well, it was a vision of this woman. If she were living and on her feet and wrapped, as I have shown you, in this veil, you would behold a living picture of the person I saw passing out of this room that morning."

"I shall not dispute you," I answered. Alas! I had myself perceived the likeness the instant the veil had fallen about the pinched but handsome features!

"A forewarning," whispered my wife; "a forewarning of what has this day happened under our roof. It was a wraith

we saw. Wilbur, I shall not spend another night in these rooms."

And we did not. I was as anxious to leave as she was. Yet I am not a superstitious man. As proof of it, after the first effect of these events had left me I began to question my first impressions and feel tolerably ashamed of my past credulity. Though the phenomenon we had observed could not to all appearance be explained by any natural hypothesis; though I had seen, and my wife had seen, a strange woman suddenly become visible in a room which a moment before had held no one but ourselves, and into which no live woman could have entered without our knowledge, something—was it my natural good sense?—recoiled before a supernatural explanation of this, and I found myself forced to believe that our first visitor had been as real as the last; in other words, the same woman.

But could I prove it? Could the seemingly impossible be made possible and the unexplainable receive a solution satisfying to a rational mind? I determined to make an effort to accomplish this, if only to relieve the mind of my wife, who had not recovered her equanimity as readily as myself.

Starting with the assumption above mentioned—that the woman who had died in our presence was the same who had previously found an unexplainable entrance into our rooms—I first inquired if the black cloak lined with gray did not offer a solution to some of my previous difficulties. It was a long cloak, enveloping her completely. When worn with the black side out she would present an inconspicuous appearance, but with the gray side out and the effect of this heightened by a long gray veil hung over her hat, she would look like the gray lady I had first seen. Now, a cloak can be turned in an instant, and if she had chosen to do this in flitting through my door I would naturally find only a sedate, black-clothed woman passing up the street, when, rousing from the apathy into which her appearance had thrown me, I rushed to the front door and looked out. Had I seen such a woman? I seemed to remember that I had.

Thus much, then, was satisfactory, but to account for her entrance into our rooms was not so easy. Had she slipped by me in coming in as she had on going out? The parlor door

was open, for I had been out to get the paper. Could she have glided in by me unperceived and thus found her way into the bedroom from which I afterward saw her issue? No, for I had stood facing the front hall door all the time. Through the bedroom door, then? But that was, as I have said, locked. Here, then, was a mystery; but it was one worth solving.

My first step was to recall all that I had heard of the actual woman who had been buried from our rooms. Her name, as ascertained in the cheap boarding-house to which she was traced, was Helmuth, and she was, so far as any one knew, without friends or relatives in the city. To those who saw her daily she was a harmless, slightly demented woman with money enough to live above want, but not enough to warrant her boasting talk about the rich things she was going to buy some day and the beautiful presents she would soon be in a position to give away. The money found on her person was sufficient to bury her, but no papers were in her possession nor any letters calculated to throw light upon her past life.

Her lameness had been caused by paralysis, but the date of her attack was not known.

Finding no clue in this to what I wished to learn, I went back to our old rooms, which had not been let since our departure, and sought for one there, and, strangely enough, found it. I thought I knew everything there was to be known about the apartment we had lived in two months, but one little fact had escaped me which, under the scrutiny that I now gave it, became apparent. This was simply that the key which opened the hall door of the bedroom and which we had seldom if ever used was not as old a key as that of the corresponding door in the parlor, and this fact, small as it was, led me to make inquiries.

The result was that I learned something about the couple who had preceded us in the use of these rooms. They were of middle age and of great personal elegance but uncertain pay, the husband being nothing more nor less than a professional gambler. Their name was L'Hommedieu.

When I first heard of them I thought that Mrs. L'Hommedieu might be the Mrs. Helmuth in whose history I was

so interested, but from all I could learn she was a very different sort of person. Mrs. L'Hommedieu was gay, dashing, and capable of making a show out of flimsy silk a shopgirl would hesitate to wear. Yet she looked distinguished and wore her cheap jewelry with more grace than many a woman her diamonds. I would, consequently, have dropped this inquiry if some one had not remarked upon her having had a paralytic stroke after leaving the house. This, together with the fact that the key to the rear door, which I had found replaced by a new one, had been taken away by her and never returned, connected her so indubitably with my mysterious visitor that I resolved to pursue my investigations into Mrs. L'Hommedieu's past.

For this purpose I sought out a quaint little maiden lady living on the top floor who, I was told, knew more about the L'Hommedieus than any one in the building. Miss Winterburn, whose acquaintance I had failed to make while residing in the house, was a fluttering, eager, affable person whose one delight was, as I soon found, to talk about the L'Hommedieus. Of the story she related I give as much of it as possible in her own words.

"I was never their equal," said she, "but Mrs. L'Hommedieu was lonely, and, having no friends in town, was good enough to admit me to her parlor now and then and even to allow me to accompany her to the theater when her husband was away on one of his mysterious visits. I never liked Mr. L'Hommedieu, but I did like her. She was so different from me, and, when I first knew her, so gay and so full of conversation. But after a while she changed and was either feverishly cheerful or morbidly sad, so that my visits caused me more pain than pleasure. The reason for these changes in her was patent to everybody. Though her husband was a handsome man, he was as unprincipled as he was unfortunate. He gambled. This she once admitted to me, and while at long intervals he met with some luck he more often returned dispirited and with that hungry, ravaging look you expect to see in a wolf cheated of its prey.

"I used to be afraid he would strike her after some one of these disappointments, but I do not think he ever did. She had a determined character of her own, and there have been

times when I have thought he was as much afraid of her as she was of him. I became sure of this after one night. Mrs. L'Hommedieu and myself were having a little supper together in the front parlor you have so lately occupied. It was a very ordinary supper, for the L'Hommedieus' purse had run low, and Mrs. L'Hommedieu was not the woman to spend much at any time on her eating. It was palatable, however, and I would have enoyed it greatly if Mrs. L'Hommedieu had shown more appetite. But she ate scarcely anything and seemed very anxious and unhappy, though she laughed now and then with sudden gusts of mirth too hysterical to be real. It was not late, and yet we were both very much surprised when there came a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of a visitor.

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu, who was always *la grande dame,* rose without apparent embarrassment to meet the gentleman who entered, though I knew she could not help but feel keenly the niggardly appearance of the board she left with such grace. The stranger—he was certainly a stranger; this I could see by the formality of her manner—was a gentleman of urbane bearing and a general air of prosperity.

"I remember every word that passed.

" 'My name is Lafarge,' said he. 'I am, or rather have been, under great obligations to your husband, and I have come to discharge my debt. Is he at home?'

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu's eye, which had sparkled at his name, dropped suddenly as he put the final question.

" 'I am sorry,' she returned after a moment of embarrassment, 'but my husband is very seldom home evenings. If you will come about noon some day—'

" 'Thank you,' said he, with a bright smile, 'but I will finish my business now and with you, seeing that Mr. L'Hommedieu is not at home. Years ago—I am sure you have heard your husband mention my name—I borrowed quite a sum of money from him, which I have never paid. You recall the amount, no doubt?'

" 'I have heard Mr. L'Hommedieu say it was a thousand dollars,' she replied, with a sudden fluttering of her hands indicative of great excitement.

" 'That is the sum,' he allowed, either not noticing me or

thinking me too insignificant to be considered. 'I regret to have kept him so long out of it, but I have not forgotten to add the interest in making out this statement of my indebtedness, and if you will look over this paper and acknowledge its correctness I will leave the equivalent of my debt here and now, for I sail for Europe to-morrow morning and wish to have all my affairs in order before leaving.'

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu, who looked ready to faint from excess of feeling, summoned up her whole strength, looking so beautiful as she did so that one forgot the ribbons on her sleeves were no longer fresh and that the silk dress she wore hung in the very limpest of folds.

" 'I am obliged to you,' she said in a tone from which she strove in vain to suppress all eagerness. 'And if I can speak for Mr. L'Hommedieu he will be as grateful for your remembrance of us as for the money you so kindly offer to return to him.'

"The stranger bowed low and took out a folded paper, which he handed to her. He was not deceived, I am sure, by her grand airs, and knew as well as I did that no woman ever stood in greater need of money. But nothing in his manner betrayed this knowledge.

" 'It is a bond I give you,' he now explained. 'As you will see, it has coupons attached to it which you can cash at any time. It will prove as valuable to you as so much ready money and possibly more convenient.'

"And with just this hint, which I took as significant of his complete understanding of her position, he took her receipt and politely left the house.

"Once alone with me, who am nobody, her joy had full vent. I have never seen any one so lost in delight as she was for a few minutes. To have this money thrust upon her just at a moment when actual want seemed staring her in the face was too much of a relief for her to conceal either the misery she had been under or the satisfaction she now enjoyed. Under the gush of her emotions her whole history came out, but as you have often heard the like I will not repeat it, especially as it was all contained in the cry with which a little later she thrust the bond into my hand.

" 'He must not see it! He must not! It would go like

all the rest, and I should again be left without a cent. Take it and keep it, for I have no means of concealing it here. He is too suspicious.'

"But this was asking more than I was willing to grant. Seeing how I felt, she took the paper back and concealed it in her bosom with a look I had rather not have seen. 'You will not charge yourself with such a responsibility,' said she. 'But I can trust you not to tell him?'

"'Yes,' I nodded, feeling sick of the whole business.

"'Then—' But here the door was violently flung open and Mr. L'Hommedieu burst into the room in a state of as much excitement as his wife, only his was the excitement of desperation.

"'Gone! Gone!' he cried, ignoring me as completely as Mr. Lafarge had done. 'Not a dollar left; not even my studs! See!' And he pointed to his shirt-front hanging apart in a way I would never have looked for in this reckless but fastidious gentleman. 'Yet if I had had a dollar more or even a ring worth a dollar or so, I might have— Theresa, have you any money at all? A coin now might save us.'

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu, who had turned alarmingly pale, drew up her fine figure and resolutely confronted him. 'No!' said she, and shifting her gaze she turned it meaningly upon me.

"He misunderstood this movement. Thinking it simply a reminder of my presence, he turned, with his false but impressive show of courtesy, and made me a low bow. Then he forgot me utterly again, and, facing his wife, growled out:

"'Where are you going to get breakfast then? You don't look like a woman who expects to starve!'

"It was a fatal remark, for, do what she would, she could not prevent a slight smile of disdain, and, seeing it, he kept his eye riveted on her face till her uneasiness became manifest. Instantly his suspicion took form, and, surveying her still more fixedly, he espied a corner of the precious envelope protruding slightly above her corsage. To snatch it out, open it, and realize its value was the work of a moment. Her cry of dismay and his shout of triumph rang out simultaneously, and never have I seen such an ebullition of opposing passions as I was made witness to as his hand closed

over this small fortune and their staring eyes met in the moral struggle they had now entered upon for its ultimate possession.

"She was the first to speak. 'It was given to me; it was meant for me. If I keep it both of us will profit by it, but if you—'

"He did not wait for her to finish. 'Where did you get it?' he cried. 'I can break the bank with what I can raise on this bond at the club. Darraugh's in town. You know what that means. Luck's in the air, and with a hundred dollars—But I've no time to talk. I came for a dollar, a fifty-cent piece, a dime even, and go back with a bond worth—'

"But she was already between him and the door. 'You will never carry that bond out of this house,' she whispered in the tone which goes further than a cry. 'I have not held it in my hand to see it follow every other good thing I have had in life. I will not, Henry. Take that bond and sink it as you have all the rest and I fall at your feet a dead woman. I will never survive the destruction of my last hope.'

"He was cowed—for a moment, that is; she looked so superb and so determined. Then all that was mean and despicable in his thinly veneered nature came to the surface, and, springing forward with an oath, he was about to push her aside, when, without the moving of a finger on her part, he reeled back, recovered himself, caught at a chair, missed it, and fell heavily to the floor.

"'My God, I thank thee!' was the exclamation with which she broke from the trance of terror into which she had been thrown by his sudden attempt to pass her; and without a glance at his face, which to me looked like the face of a dead man, she tore the paper from his hand and stood looking about her with a wild and searching gaze, in the desperate hope that somehow the walls would open and offer her a safe place of concealment for the precious sheet of paper.

"Meanwhile I had crept near the prostrate man. He was breathing, but was perfectly unconscious.

"'Don't you mean to do something for him?' I asked. 'He may die.'

"She met my question with the dazed air of one suddenly awakened. 'No, he'll not die; but he'll not come to for some

minutes, and this must be hidden first. But where? where? I cannot trust it on my person or in any place a man like him would search. I must devise some means—ah!'

"With this final exclamation she had dashed into the other room. I did not see where she went—I did not want to—but I soon realized she was working somewhere in a desperate hurry. I could hear her breath coming in quick, short pants as I bent over her husband, waiting for him to rouse and hating my inaction even while I succumbed to it.

"Suddenly she was back in the parlor again, and to my surprise passed immediately to the little table in the corner where we had sat at supper. We had had for our simple refreshment that homeliest of all dishes, boiled milk thickened with flour. There was still some left in a bowl, and taking this away with her she called back hoarsely:

" 'Pray that he does not come to till I have finished. It will be the best prayer you ever made.'

"She told me afterward that he was subject to these attacks and that she had long ceased to be alarmed by them. But to me the sight of that man lying there so helpless was horrible, and, though I hated him and pitied her, I scarcely knew what to wish. While battling with my desire to run and the feeling of loyalty which held me kneeling at that man's side, I heard her speak again, this time in an even and slightly hard tone: 'Now you may dash a glass of cold water in his face. I am prepared to meet him now. Happily his memory fails after these attacks. I may succeed in making him believe that the bond he saw was one of his fancies.'

" 'Had you not better throw the water yourself?' I suggested, getting up and meeting her eye very quietly.

"She looked at me in wonder, then moved calmly to the table, took the glass, and dashed a few drops of water into her husband's face. Instantly he began to stir, seeing which I arose without haste, but without any unnecessary delay, and quickly took my leave. I could bear no more that night.

"Next morning I awoke in a fright. I had dreamed that he had come to my room in search of the bond. But it was only her knock at the door and her voice asking if she might enter at this early hour. It was such a relief I gladly let her

in, and she entered with her best air and flung herself on my little lounge with the hysterical cry:

"'He has sent me up. I told him I ought not to intrude at such an inconvenient hour; that you would not have had your breakfast.' (How carelessly she spoke! How hard she tried to keep the hungry note out of her voice!) 'But he insisted on my coming up. I know why. He searched me before I left the room, and now he wants to search the room itself.'

"'Then he did remember?' I began.

"'Yes, he remembers now. I saw it in his eyes as soon as he awoke. But he will not find the bond. That is safe, and some day when I have escaped his vigilance long enough to get it back again I will use it so as to make him comfortable as well as myself. I am not a selfish woman."

"I did not think she was, and felt pity for her, and so after dressing and making her a cup of tea, I sat down with her, and we chatted for an hour or so quite comfortably. Then she grew so restless and consulted the clock so often that I tried to soothe her by remarking that it was not an easy task he had set himself, at which she laughed in a mysterious way, but failed to grow less anxious till our suspense was cut short by the appearance of the janitor with a message from Mr. L'Hommedieu.

"'Mr. L'Hommedieu's compliments,' said he, 'and he hopes Mrs. L'Hommedieu will make herself comfortable and not think of coming down. He is doing everything that is necessary and will soon be through. You can rest quite easy, ma'am.'

"'What does he mean?' marveled the poor woman as the janitor disappeared. 'Is he spending all this time ransacking the rooms? I wish I dared disobey him. I wish I dared go down.'

"But her courage was not equal to an open disregard of his wishes, and she had to subdue her impatience and wait for a summons that did not come till near two o'clock. Then Mr. Hommedieu himself appeared with her hat and mantle on his arm.

"'My dear,' said he as she rose, haggard with excitement, to meet him, 'I have brought your wraps with me that you

may go directly from here to our new home. Shall I assist you to put them on? You do not look as well as usual, and that is why I have undertaken this thing all myself—to save you, my dear; to save you each and every exertion.'

"I had flung out my arms to catch her, for I thought she was going to faint, but she did not, though I think it would have been better for her if she had.

"'We are going to leave this house?' she asked, speaking very slowly and with a studied lack of emotion that imposed upon nobody.

"'I have said so,' he smiled. 'The dray has already taken away the half of our effects, and the rest will follow at Mrs. Latimer's convenience.'

"'Ah, I understand!' she replied, with a gasp of relief significant of her fear that by some superhuman cunning he had found the bond she thought so safely concealed. 'I was wondering how Mrs. Latimer came to allow us to leave.' (I tell you they always talked as if I were not present.) 'Our goods are left as a surety, it seems.'

"'Half of our goods,' he blandly corrected. 'Would it interest you to know which half?'

"The cunning of this insinuation was matched by the imperturbable shrug with which she replied, 'So a bed has been allowed us and some clothes I am satisfied,' at which he bit his lips, vexed at her self-control and his own failure to break it.

"'You have not asked where we are going,' he observed, as with apparent solicitude he threw her mantle over her shoulders.

"The air of lassitude with which she replied bespoke her feeling on that point. 'I have little curiosity,' she said. 'You know I can be happy anywhere.' And, turning toward me, she moved her lips in a way I interpreted to mean: 'Go below with me. See me out.'

"'Say what you have to say to Miss Winterburn aloud,' he dryly suggested.

"'I have nothing to say to Miss Winterburn but thanks,' was her cold reply, belied, however, by the trembling of her fingers as she essayed to fit on her gloves.

"'And those I will receive below!' I cried, with affected

gaiety. 'I am going down with you to the door.' And resolutely ignoring his frown I tripped down before them. On the last stair I felt her steps lagging. Instantly I seemed to comprehend what was required of me, and, rushing forward, I entered the front parlor. He followed close behind me, for how could he know I was not in collusion with her to regain the bond? This gave her one minute by herself in the rear, and in that minute she secured the key which would give her future access to the spot where her treasure lay hidden.

"The rest of the story I must give you mainly from hearsay. You must understand by this time what Mr. L'Hommedieu's scheme was in moving so suddenly. He knew that it would be impossible for him, by the most minute and continuous watchfulness, to prevent his wife from recovering the bond while they continued to inhabit the rooms in which, notwithstanding his failure to find it, he had reason to believe it still lay concealed. But once in other quarters it would be comparatively easy for him to subject her to a surveillance which not only would prevent her from returning to this house without his knowledge, but would lead her to give away her secret by the very natural necessity she would be under of going to the exact spot where her treasure lay hid.

"It was a cunning plot and showed him to be as able as he was unscrupulous. How it worked I will now proceed to tell you. It must have been the next afternoon that the janitor came running up to me—I suppose he had learned by this time that I had more than ordinary interest in these people—to say that Mrs. L'Hommedieu had been in the house and had been so frightened by a man who had followed her that she had fainted dead away on the floor. Would I go down to her?

"I had rather have gone anywhere else, unless it was to prison; but duty cannot be shirked, and I followed the man down. But we were too late. Mrs. L'Hommedieu had recovered and gone away, and the person who had frightened her was also gone, and only the hallboy remained to give any explanations.

"This was what he had to say:

"'The man it was who went first. As soon as the lady fell he skipped out. I don't think he meant no good here—'

"'Did she drop here in the hall?' I asked, unable to restrain my intense anxiety.

"'Oh, no, ma'am! They was in the back room yonder, which she got in somehow. The man followed her in, sneaking and sneaking like an eel or a cop, and she fell right against—'

"'Don't tell me where?' I cried. 'I don't want to know where!' And I was about to return upstairs when I heard a quick, sharp voice behind me and realized that Mr. L'Hommedieu had come in and was having some dispute with the janitor.

"Common prudence led me to listen. He wanted, as was very natural, to enter the room where his wife had just been surprised, but the janitor, alarmed by the foregoing very irregular proceedings, was disposed to deny his right to do so.

"'The furniture is held as a surety,' said he, 'and I have orders—'

"But Mr. L'Hommedieu had a spare dollar, and before many minutes had elapsed I heard him go into that room and close the door. Of the next ten minutes and the suspense I felt I need not speak. When he came out again, he looked as if the ground would not hold him.

"'I have done some mischief, I fear,' he airily said as he passed the janitor. 'But I'll pay for it. Don't worry. I'll pay for it and the rent, too, to-morrow. You may tell Mrs. Latimer so.' And he was gone, leaving us all agape in the hallway.

"A minute later we all crept to that room and looked in. Now that he had got the bond I for one was determined to know where she had hid it. There was no mistaking the spot. A single glance was enough to show us the paper ripped off from a portion of the wall, revealing a narrow gap behind the baseboard large enough to hold the bond. It was near—"

"Wait!" I put in as I remembered where the so-called Mrs. Helmuth had pointed just before she died. "Wasn't it

at the left of the large folding doors and midway to the wall?"

"How came you to know?" she asked. "Did Mrs. Latimer tell you?" But as I did not answer she soon took up the thread of her narrative again, and, sighing softly, said:

"The next day came and went, but no L'Hommedieu appeared: another, and I began to grow seriously uneasy; a third, and a dreadful thing happened. Late in the afternoon Mrs. L'Hommedieu, dressed very oddly, came sliding in at the front door, and with an appealing smile at the hallboy, who wished but dared not ask her for the key which made these visits possible, glided by to her old rooms, and, finding the door unlocked, went softly in. Her appearance is worth description, for it shows the pitiful efforts she made at disguise, in the hope, I suppose, of escaping the surveillance she was evidently conscious of being under. She was in the habit of wearing on cool days a black circular with a gray lining. This she had turned inside out so that the gray was uppermost; while over her neat black bonnet she had flung a long veil, also gray, which not only hid her face, but gave her appearance an eccentric look as different as possible from her usual aspect. The hallboy, who had never seen her save in showy black or bright colors, said she looked like a ghost in the daytime, but it was all done for a purpose, I am sure, and to escape the attention of the man who had followed her before. Alas, he might have followed her this time without addition to her suffering! Scarcely had she entered the room where her treasure had been left than she saw the torn paper and gaping baseboard, and, uttering a cry so piercing it found its way even to the stolid heart of the hallboy, she tottered back into the hall, where she fell into the arms of her husband, who had followed her in from the street in a state of frenzy almost equal to her own.

"The janitor, who that minute appeared on the stairway, says that he never saw two such faces. They looked at each other and were speechless. He was the first to hang his head.

"'It is gone, Henry,' she whispered. 'It is gone. You have taken it.'

"He did not answer.

"And it is true. You have risked it, and it is true."

"He uttered a groan. 'You should have given it to me that night. There was luck in the air then. Now the devil is the card-dealer.'

"Then came what I shall never forget. 'My curse be upon you, Henry L'Hommedieu!' And whether it was the luck which was the present-day interpretation, or whether there was some latent hate left in the heart for the long-suffering and once beautiful woman to shriek at her words and curse her husband, I do not know. But there was a sudden silence in the darkness, followed a heart-sick groan, and I rushed from the house. The curse was then spoken.

"I do not see her but once more, under a peculiar circumstance which I shall relate in its proper place. She was taken to a lunatic asylum, I presume, and died there, for I never heard of her again. She was the wife of her friend who did not know me, and she was the mother of Mrs. Lennox, who is a most estimable woman, with her husband's and her own fortune, and who, I presume, still lives.

lock the door behind her. My wife, who must have fallen into a doze on my leaving her, did not see her enter, but detected her just as she was trying to escape through the folding doors. My presence in the parlor probably added to her embarrassment, and she fled, turning her cloak as she did so.

How simple it seemed now that we knew the facts; but how obscure, and, to all appearance, unexplainable, before the clue was given to the mystery!

The Thief

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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"AND now, if you have all seen the coin and sufficiently admired it, you may pass it back. I make a point of never leaving it off the shelf for more than fifteen minutes."

The half dozen or more guests seated about the board of the genial speaker, glanced casually at each other as though expecting to see the object mentioned immediately produced.

But no coin appeared.

"I have other amusements waiting," suggested their host, with a smile in which even his wife could detect no signs of impatience. "Now let Robert put it back into the cabinet."

Robert was the butler.

Blank looks, negative gestures, but still no coin.

"Perhaps it is in somebody's lap," timidly ventured one of the younger women. "It doesn't seem to be on the table."

Immediately all the ladies began lifting their napkins and shaking out the gloves which lay under them, in an effort to relieve their own embarrassment and that of the gentlemen who had not even so simple a resource as this at their command.

"It can't be lost," protested Mr. Sedgwick, with an air of perfect confidence. "I saw it but a minute ago in somebody's hand. Darrow, you had it; what did you do with it?"

"Passed it along."

"Well, well, it must be under somebody's plate or doily." And he began to move about his own and such dishes as were within reach of his hand.

Each guest imitated him, lifting glasses and turning over spoons till Mr. Sedgwick himself bade them desist. "It's slipped to the floor," he nonchalantly concluded. "A toast

to the ladies, and we will give Robert the chance of looking for it."

As they drank this toast, his apparently careless, but quietly astute, glance took in each countenance about him. The coin was very valuable and its loss would be keenly felt by him. Had it slipped from the table some one's eye would have perceived it, some hand would have followed it. Only a minute or two before, the attention of the whole party had been concentrated upon it. Darrow had held it up for all to see, while he discoursed upon its history. He would take Darrow aside at the first opportunity and ask him— But—it! how could he do that? These were his intimate friends. He knew them well, more than well, with one exception, and he— Well, he was the handsomest of the lot and the most debonair and agreeable. A little more gay than usual to-night, possibly a trifle too gay, considering that a man of Mr. Blake's social weight and business standing sat at the board; but not to be suspected, no, not to be suspected, even if he was the next man after Darrow and had betrayed something like confusion when the eyes of the whole table turned his way at the former's simple statement of "I passed it on." Robert would find the coin; he was a fool to doubt it; and if Robert did not, why, he would simply have to pocket his chagrin, and not let a triviality like this throw a shadow over his hospitality.

All this, while he genially lifted his glass and proposed the health of the ladies. The constraint of the preceding moment was removed by his manner, and a dozen jests caused as many merry laughs. Then he pushed back his chair.

"And now, some music!" he cheerfully cried, as with lingering glances and some further pokings about of the table furniture, the various guests left their places and followed him into the adjoining room.

But the ladies were too nervous and the gentlemen not sufficiently sure of their voices to undertake the entertainment of the rest at a moment of such acknowledged suspense; and notwithstanding the exertions of their host and his quiet but much discomfited wife, it soon became apparent that but one thought engrossed them all, and that any at-

tempt at conversation must prove futile so long as the curtains between the two rooms remained open and they could see Robert on his hands and knees searching the floor and shoving aside the rugs.

Darrow, who was Mr. Sedgwick's brother-in-law and almost as much at home in the house as Sedgwick himself, made a move to draw these curtains, but something in his relative's face stopped him and he desisted with some laughing remark which did not attract enough attention, even, to elicit any response.

"I hope his eyesight is good," murmured one of the young girls, edging a trifle forward. "Mayn't I help him look? They say at home that I am the only one in the house who can find anything."

Mr. Sedgwick smiled indulgently at the speaker (a round-faced, round-eyed, merry-hearted girl whom in days gone by he had dandled on his knees), but answered quite quickly for him:

"Robert will find it if it is there." Then, distressed at this involuntary disclosure of his thought, added in his whole-hearted way: "It's such a little thing, and the room is so big and a round object rolls unexpectedly far, you know. Well, have you got it?" he eagerly demanded, as the butler finally showed himself in the door.

"No, sir; and it's not in the dining-room. I have cleared the table and thoroughly searched the floor."

Mr. Sedgwick knew that he had. He had no doubts about Robert. Robert had been in his employ for years and had often handled his coins and, at his order, sometimes shown them.

"Very well," said he, "we'll not bother about it any more to-night; you may draw the curtains."

But here the clear, almost strident voice of the youngest man of the party interposed.

"Wait a minute," said he. "This especial coin is the great treasure of Mr. Sedgwick's valuable collection. It is unique in this country, and not only worth a great deal of money, but cannot be duplicated at any cost. There are only three of its stamp in the world. Shall we let the matter pass, then, as though it were of small importance? I feel

that we cannot; that we are, in a measure, responsible for its disappearance. Mr. Sedgwick handed it to us to look at, and while it was going through our hands it vanished. What must he think? What has he every right to think? I need not put it into words; you know what you would think, what you could not help but think, if the object were yours and it was lost in this way. Gentlemen—I leave the ladies entirely out of this—I do not propose that he shall have further opportunity to associate me with this very natural doubt. I demand the privilege of emptying my pockets here and now, before any of us have left his presence. I am a connoisseur in coins myself and consequently find it imperative to take the initiative in this matter. As I propose to spare the ladies, let us step back into the dining-room. Mr. Sedgwick, pray don't deny me; I'm thoroughly in earnest, I assure you."

The astonishment created by this audacious proposition was so great, and the feeling it occasioned so intense, that for an instant all stood speechless. Young Hammersley was a millionaire himself, and generous to a fault, as all knew. Under no circumstances would any one even suspect him of appropriating anything, great or small, to which he had not a perfect right. Nor was he likely to imagine for a moment that any one would. That he could make such a proposition then, based upon any such plea, argued a definite suspicion in some other quarter, which could not pass unrecognized. In vain Mr. Sedgwick raised his voice in frank and decided protest, two of the gentlemen had already made a quick move toward Robert, who still stood, stupefied by the situation, with his hand on the cord which controlled the curtains.

"He is quite right," remarked one of these, as he passed into the dining-room. "I shouldn't sleep a wink to-night if this question remained unsettled." The other, the oldest man present, the financier of whose standing and highly esteemed character I have already spoken, said nothing, but followed in a way to show that his mind was equally made up.

The position in which Mr. Sedgwick found himself placed was far from enviable. With a glance at the two remaining gentlemen, he turned towards the ladies now standing in a close group at the other end of the room. One of them was

his wife, and he quivered internally as he noted the deep red of her distressed countenance. But it was the others he addressed, singling out, with the rare courtesy which was his by nature, the one comparative stranger, Darrow's niece, a Rochester girl, who could not be finding this, her first party in Boston, very amusing.

"I hope you will appreciate the dilemma in which I have been placed by these gentlemen," he began, "and will pardon—"

But here he noticed that she was not in the least attending; her eyes were on the handsome figure of Hugh Clifford, her uncle's neighbor at table, who in company with Mr. Hammersley was still hesitating in the doorway. As Mr. Sedgwick stopped his useless talk, the two passed in and the sound of her fluttering breath as she finally turned a listening ear his way, caused him to falter as he repeated his assurances and begged her indulgence.

She answered with some conventional phrase which he forgot while crossing the room. But the remembrance of her slight satin-robed figure, drawn up in an attitude whose carelessness was totally belied by the anxiety of her half-averted glance, followed him into the presence of the four men awaiting him. Four? I should say five, for Robert was still there, though in a corner by himself, ready, no doubt, to share any attempt which the others might make to prove their innocence.

"The ladies will await us in the music-room," announced the host on entering; and then paused, disconcerted by the picture suddenly disclosed to his eye. On one side stood the two who had entered first, with their eyes fixed in open sternness on young Clifford, who, quite alone on the rug, faced them with a countenance of such pronounced pallor that there seemed to be nothing else in the room. As his features were singularly regular and his almost perfect mouth accentuated by a smile as set as his figure was immobile, the effect was so startling that not only Mr. Sedgwick, but every other person present, no doubt, wished that the plow had never turned the furrow which had brought this wretched coin to light.

However, the affair had gone too far now for retreat, as

was shown by Mr. Blake, the elderly financier whom all were ready to recognize as the chief guest there. With an apologetic glance at Mr. Hammersley, the impetuous young millionaire who had first proposed this embarrassing procedure, he advanced to an empty side-table and began, in a quiet, business-like way, to lay on it the contents of his various pockets. As the pile rose, the silence grew, the act in itself was so simple, the motive actuating it so serious and out of accord with the standing of the company and the nature of the occasion. When all was done, he stepped up to Mr. Sedgwick, with his arms raised and held out from his body.

"Now accommodate me," said he, "by running your hands up and down my chest. I have a secret pocket there which should be empty at this time."

Mr. Sedgwick, fascinated by his look, did as he was bid, reporting shortly:

"You are quite correct. I find nothing there."

Mr. Blake stepped back. As he did so, every eye, suddenly released from his imposing figure, flashed towards the immovable Clifford, to find him still absorbed by the action and attitude of the man who had just undergone what to him doubtless appeared a degrading ordeal. Pale before, he was absolutely livid now, though otherwise unchanged. To break the force of what appeared to be an open, if involuntary, self-betrayal, another guest stepped forward; but no sooner had he raised his hand to his vest-pocket than Clifford moved, and in a high, strident voice totally unlike his usual tones remarked:

"This is all—all—very interesting and commendable, no doubt. But for such a procedure to be of any real value it should be entered into by all. Gentlemen"—his rigidity was all gone now and so was his pallor—"I am unwilling to submit myself to what, in my eyes, is an act of unnecessary humiliation. Our word should be enough. I have not the coin—" Stopped by the absolute silence, he cast a distressed look into the faces about him, till it reached that of Mr. Sedgwick, where it lingered, in an appeal to which that gentleman, out of his great heart, instantly responded.

"One *should* take the word of the gentleman he invites to

his house. We will excuse you, and excuse all the others from the unnecessary ceremony which Mr. Blake has been good enough to initiate."

But this show of favor was not to the mind of the last-mentioned gentleman, and met with instant reproof.

"Not so fast, Sedgwick. I am the oldest man here and I did not feel it was enough simply to state that this coin was not on my person. As to the question of humiliation, it strikes me that humiliation would lie, in this instance, in a refusal for which no better excuse can be given than the purely egotistical one of personal pride."

At this attack, the fine head of Clifford rose, and Darrow, remembering the girl within, felt instinctively grateful that she was not here to note the effect it gave to his person.

"I regret to differ," said he. "To me no humiliation could equal that of demonstrating in this open manner the fact of one's not being a thief."

Mr. Blake gravely surveyed him. For some reason the issue seemed no longer to lie between Clifford and the actual loser of the coin, but between him and his fellow guest, this uncompromising banker.

"A thief!" repeated the young man, in an indescribable tone full of bitterness and scorn.

Mr. Blake remained unmoved; he was a just man but strict, hard to himself, hard to others. But he was not entirely without heart. Suddenly his expression lightened. A certain possible explanation of the other's attitude had entered his mind.

"Young men sometimes have reasons for their susceptibilities which the old forget. If you have such—if you carry a photograph, believe that we have no interest in pictures of any sort to-night and certainly would fail to recognize them."

A smile of disdain flickered across the young man's lip. Evidently it was no discovery of this kind that he feared.

"I carry no photographs," said he; and, bowing low to his host, he added in a measured tone which but poorly hid his profound agitation, "I regret to have interfered in the slightest way with the pleasure of the evening. If you will be so good as to make my excuses to the ladies, I will with-

draw from a presence upon which I have made so poor an impression."

Mr. Sedgwick prized his coin and despised deceit, but he could not let a guest leave him in this manner. Instinctively he held out his hand. Proudly young Clifford dropped his own into it; but the lack of mutual confidence was felt and the contact was a cold one. Half regretting his impulsive attempt at courtesy, Mr. Sedgwick drew back, and Clifford was already at the door leading into the hall, when Hammersley, who by his indiscreet proposition had made all this trouble for him, sprang forward and caught him by the arm.

"Don't go," he whispered. "You're done for if you leave like this. I—I was a brute to propose such an asinine thing, but having done so I am bound to see you out of the difficulty. Come into the adjoining room—there is nobody there at present—and we will empty our pockets together and find this lost article if we can. I may have pocketed it myself, in a fit of abstraction."

Did the other hesitate? Some thought so; but, if he did, it was but momentarily.

"I cannot," he muttered; "think what you will of me, but let me go." And dashing open the door he disappeared from their sight just as light steps and the rustle of skirts were heard again in the adjoining room.

"There are the ladies. What shall we say to them?" queried Sedgwick, stepping slowly towards the intervening curtains.

"Tell them the truth," enjoined Mr. Blake, as he hastily repocketed his own belongings. "Why should a handsome devil like that be treated with any more consideration than another? He has a secret if he hasn't a coin. Let them know this. It may save some one a future heartache."

The last sentence was muttered, but Mr. Sedgwick heard it. Perhaps that was why his first movement on entering the adjoining room was to cross over to the cabinet and shut and lock the heavily paneled door which had been left standing open. At all events, the action drew general attention and caused an instant silence, broken the next minute by an ardent cry:

"So your search was futile?"

It came from the lady least known, the interesting young stranger whose personality had made so vivid an impression upon him.

"Quite so," he answered, hastily facing her with an attempted smile. "The gentlemen decided not to carry matters to the length first proposed. The object was not worth it. I approved their decision. This was meant for a joyous occasion. Why mar it by unnecessary unpleasantness?"

She had given him her full attention while he was speaking, but her eye wandered away the moment he had finished and rested searchingly on the other gentlemen. Evidently she missed a face she had expected to find there, for her color changed and she drew back behind the other ladies with the light, unmusical laugh women sometimes use to hide a secret emotion.

It brought Mr. Darrow forward.

"Some were not willing to subject themselves to what they considered an unnecessary humiliation," he curtly remarked. "Mr. Clifford—"

"There! let us drop it," put in his brother-in-law. "I've lost my coin and that's the end of it. I don't intend to have the evening spoiled for a thing like that. Music! ladies, music and a jolly air! No more dumps." And with as hearty a laugh as he could command in face of the somber looks he encountered on every side, he led the way back into the music-room.

Once there the women seemed to recover their spirits; that is, such as remained. One had disappeared. A door opened from this room into the main hall and through this a certain young lady had vanished before the others had had time to group themselves about the piano. We know who this lady was; possibly, we know, too, why her hostess did not follow her.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clifford had gone upstairs for his coat and was lingering there, the prey of some very bitter reflections. Though he had encountered nobody on the stairs, and neither heard nor saw any one in the halls, he felt confident that he was not unwatched. He remembered the look on the butler's face as he tore himself away from Hammersley's restraining hand, and he knew what that fellow thought and

also was quite able to guess what that fellow would do, if his suspicions were farther awakened. This conviction brought an odd and not very open smile to his face, as he finally turned to descend the one flight which separated him from the front door he was so ardently desirous of closing behind him for ever.

A moment and he would be down; but the steps were many and seemed to multiply indefinitely as he sped below. Should his departure be noted, and some one advance to detain him! He fancied he heard a rustle in the open space under the stairs. Were any one to step forth, Robert or— With a start, he paused and clutched the banister. Some one had stepped forth; a woman! The swish of her skirts was unmistakable. He felt the chill of a new dread. Never in his short but triumphant career had he met coldness or disapproval in the eye of a woman. Was he to encounter it now? If so, it would go hard with him. He trembled as he turned his head to see which of the four it was. If it should prove to be his hostess— But it was not she; it was Darrow's young friend, the pretty inconsequent girl he had chatted with at the dinner-table, and afterwards completely forgotten in the events which had centered all his thoughts upon himself. And she was standing there, waiting for him! He would have to pass her,—notice her,—speak.

But when the encounter occurred and their eyes met, he failed to find in hers any sign of the disapproval he feared, but instead a gentlewomanly interest which he might interpret deeply, or otherwise, according to the measure of his need.

That need seemed to be a deep one at this instant, for his countenance softened perceptibly as he took her quietly extended hand.

"Good-night," she said; "I am just going myself," and with an entrancing smile of perfect friendliness, she fluttered past him up the stairs.

It was the one and only greeting which his sick heart could have sustained without flinching. Just this friendly farewell of one acquaintance to another, as though no change had taken place in his relations to society and the world. And she was a woman and not a thoughtless girl! Staring

after her slight, elegant figure, slowly ascending the stair, he forgot to return her cordial greeting. What delicacy, and yet what character there was in the poise of her spirited head! He felt his breath fail him, in his anxiety for another glance from her eye, for some sign, however small, that she had carried the thought of him up those few, quickly mounted steps. Would he get it? She is at the bend of the stair; she pauses—turns, a nod—and she is gone.

With an impetuous gesture, he dashed from the house.

In the drawing-room the noise of the closing door was heard, and a change at once took place in the attitude and expression of all present. The young millionaire approached Mr. Sedgwick and confidentially remarked:

"There goes your precious coin. I'm sure of it. I even think I can tell the exact place in which it is hidden. His hand went to his left coat-pocket once too often."

"That's right. I noticed the action also," chimed in Mr. Darrow, who had stepped up, unobserved. "And I noticed something else. His whole appearance altered from the moment this coin came on the scene. An indefinable half-eager, half-furtive look crept into his eye as he saw it passed from hand to hand. I remember it now, though it didn't make much impression upon me at the time."

"And I remember another thing," supplemented Hammersley in his anxiety to set himself straight with these men of whose entire approval he was not quite sure. "He raised his napkin to his mouth very frequently during the meal and held it there longer than is usual, too. Once he caught me looking at him, and for a moment he flushed scarlet, then he broke out with one of his witty remarks and I had to laugh like everybody else. If I am not mistaken, his napkin was up and his right hand working behind it, about the time Mr. Sedgwick requested the return of his coin."

"The idiot! Hadn't he sense enough to know that such a loss wouldn't pass unquestioned? The gem of the collection; known all over the country, and he's not even a connoisseur."

"No; I've never even heard him mention numismatics."

"Mr. Darrow spoke of its value. Perhaps that was what

tempted him. I know that Clifford's been rather down on his luck lately."

"Eh! Well, he don't look it. There isn't one of us so well set up. Pardon me, Mr Hammersley, you understand what I mean. He perhaps rides a little but too much on his fine clothes."

"He needn't. His fare is his fortune—all the one he's got, I hear it said. He had a pretty income from Consolidated Silver, but that's gone up and left him in what you call difficulties. If he has debts besides—"

But here Mr Darrow was called off. His niece wanted to see him for one minute in the hall. When he came back it was to make his adieu and hers. She had been taken suddenly indisposed and his duty was to see her immediately home. This broke up the party, and amid general protestations the various guests were taking their leave when the whole scene was stormed by a smothered cry from the dining-room, and the precipitate entrance of Robert, asking for Mr Sedgwick.

"What's up? What's happened?" demanded that gentleman, hurriedly advancing towards the agitated butler.

"Found!" he exclaimed, holding up the coin between his thumb and forefinger. "It was standing straight up between two leaves of the table. It tumbled and fell to the floor as Luke and I were taking them out."

Silence which could be felt for a moment. Then each man turned and surveyed his neighbor, while the women's voices rose in little cries that were almost hysterical.

"I knew that it would be found, and found here," came from the hallway in rich, resonant tones. "Uncle, do not hurry: I am feeling better," followed in unconscious naïveté, as the young girl stepped in, showing a countenance in which were small signs of indisposition or even of depressed spirits.

Mr. Darrow, with a smile of sympathetic understanding, joined the others now crowding about the butler.

"I noticed the crack between these two leaves when I pushed about the plates and dishes," he was saying. "But I never thought of looking in it for the missing coin. I'm sure I'm very sorry that I didn't."

Mr Darrow, to whom these words had revealed a circum-

stance he had otherwise completely forgotten, anxiously remarked: "That must have happened shortly after it left my hand. I recall now that the lady sitting between me and Clifford gave it a twirl which sent it spinning over the bare table-top. I don't think she realized the action. She was listening—we all were—to a flow of bright repartee going on below us, and failed to follow the movements of the coin. Otherwise, she would have spoken. But what a marvel that it should have reached that crack in just the position to fall in!"

"It wouldn't happen again, not if we spun it there for a month of Sundays."

"But Mr. Clifford!" put in an agitated voice.

"Yes, it has been rather hard on him. But he shouldn't have such keen sensibilities. If he had emptied out his pockets cheerfully and at the first intimation, none of this unpleasantness would have happened. Mr. Sedgwick, I congratulate you upon the recovery of this valuable coin, and am quite ready to offer my services if you wish to make Mr. Clifford immediately acquainted with Robert's discovery."

"Thank you, but I will perform that duty myself," was Mr. Sedgwick's quiet rejoinder, as he unlocked the door of his cabinet and carefully restored the coin to its proper place.

When he faced back, he found his guests on the point of leaving. Only one gave signs of any intention of lingering. This was the elderly financier who had shown such stern resolve in his treatment of Mr. Clifford's so-called sensibilities. He had confided his wife to the care of Mr. Darrow, and now met Mr. Sedgwick with this remark:

"I'm going to ask a favor of you. If, as you have intimated, it is your intention to visit Mr. Clifford to-night, I should like to go with you. I don't understand this young man and his unaccountable attitude in this matter, and it is very important that I should. Have you any objection to my company? My motor is at the door, and we can settle the affair in twenty minutes."

"None," returned his host, a little surprised, however, at the request. "His pride does seem a little out of place, but he was among comparative strangers, and seemed to feel his

honor greatly impugned by Hammersley's unfortunate proposition. I'm sorry way down to the ground for what has occurred, and cannot carry him our apologies too soon."

"No, you cannot," retorted the other shortly. And so seriously did he utter this that no time was lost by Mr. Sedgwick, and as soon as they could get into their coats, they were in the motor and on their way to the young man's apartment.

Their experience began at the door. A man was lolling there who told them that Mr. Clifford had changed his quarters; where he did not know. But upon the production of a five-dollar bill, he remembered enough about it to give them a number and street where possibly they might find him. In a rush, they hastened there; only to hear the same story from the sleepy elevator boy anticipating his last trip up for the night.

"Mr. Clifford left a week ago; he didn't tell me where he was going."

Nevertheless the boy knew; that they saw, and another but smaller bill came into requisition and awoke his sleepy memory.

The street and number which he gave made the two well-to-do men stare. But they said nothing, though the looks they cast back at the second-rate quarters they were leaving, so far below the elegant apartment house they had visited first, were sufficiently expressive. The scale of descent from luxury to positive discomfort was proving a rapid one and prepared them for the dismal, ill-cared-for, altogether repulsive doorway before which they halted next. No attendant waited here; not even an elevator boy; the latter for the good reason that there was no elevator. An uninviting flight of stairs was before them; and on the few doors within sight a simple card showed the name of the occupant.

Mr. Sedgwick glanced at his companion.

"Shall we go up?" he asked.

Mr. Blake nodded. "We'll find him," said he, "if it takes all night."

"Surely he cannot have sunk lower than this."

"Remembering his get-up, I do not think so. Yet who knows? Some mystery lies back of his whole conduct. Din-

ing in your home, with this to come back to! I don't wonder—"

But here a thought struck him. Pausing with his foot on the stair, he turned a flushed countenance towards Mr. Sedgwick. "I've an idea," said he. "Perhaps—" He whispered the rest.

Mr. Sedgwick stared and shook his shoulders. "Possibly," said he, flushing slightly in his turn. Then, as they proceeded up, "I feel like a brute, anyway. A sorry night's business all through, unless the end proves better than the beginning."

"We'll start from the top. Something tells me that we shall find him close under the roof. Can you read the names by such a light?"

"Barely; but I have matches."

And now there might have been witnessed by any chance home-comer the curious sight of two extremely well-dressed men pottering through the attic hall of this decaying old domicile, reading the cards on the doors by means of a lighted match.

And vainly. On none of the cards could be seen the name they sought.

"We're on the wrong track," protested Mr. Blake. "No use keeping this up," but found himself stopped, when about to turn away, by a gesture of Sedgwick's.

"There's a light under the door you see there untagged," said he. "I'm going to knock."

He did so. There was a sound within and then utter silence.

He knocked again. A man's step was heard approaching the door, then again the silence.

Mr. Sedgwick made a third essay, and then the door was suddenly pulled inward and in the gap they saw the handsome face and graceful figure of the young man they had so lately encountered amid palatial surroundings. But how changed! how openly miserable! and when he saw who his guests were, how proudly defiant of their opinion and presence.

"You have found the coin," he quietly remarked. "I appreciate your courtesy in coming here to inform me of it.

Will not that answer, without further conversation? I am on the point of retiring and—and—"

Even the hardihood of a very visible despair gave way for an instant as he met Mr. Sedgwick's eye. In the break which followed, the older man spoke.

"Pardon us, but we have come thus far with a double purpose. First, to tender our apologies, which you have been good enough to accept; secondly, to ask, in no spirit of curiosity, I assure you, a question that I seem to see answered, but which I should be glad to hear confirmed by your lips. May we not come in?"

The question was put with a rare smile such as sometimes was seen on this hard-grained handler of millions, and the young man, seeing it, faltered back, leaving the way open for them to enter. The next minute he seemed to regret the impulse, for backing against a miserable table they saw there, he drew himself up with an air as nearly hostile as one of his nature could assume.

"I know of no question," said he, "which I feel at this very late hour inclined to answer. A man who has been tracked as I must have been for you to find me here, is hardly in a mood to explain his poverty or the mad desire for former luxuries which took him to the house of one friendly enough, he thought, to accept his presence without inquiry as to the place he lived in or the nature or number of the reverses which had brought him to such a place as this."

"I do not—believe me—" faltered Mr. Sedgwick, greatly embarrassed and distressed. In spite of the young man's attempt to hide the contents of the table, he had seen the two objects lying there—a piece of bread or roll, and a half-cocked revolver.

Mr. Blake had seen them, too, and at once took the word out of his companion's mouth.

"You mistake us," he said coldly, "as well as the nature of our errand. We are here from no motive of curiosity, as I have before said, nor from any other which might offend or distress you. We—or rather I am here on business. I have a position to offer to an intelligent, upright, enterprising young man. Your name has been given me. It was given

me before this dinner, to which I went—if Mr. Sedgwick will pardon my plain speaking—chiefly for the purpose of making your acquaintance. The result was what you know, and possibly now you can understand my anxiety to see you exonerate yourself from the doubts you yourself raised by your attitude of resistance to the proposition made by that headlong, but well-meaning, young man of many millions, Mr. Hammersley. I wanted to find in you the honorable characteristics necessary to the man who is to draw an eight thousand dollars a year salary under my eye. I still want to do this. If then you are willing to make this whole thing plain to me—for it is not plain—not wholly plain, Mr. Clifford—then you will find in me a friend such as few young fellows can boast of, for I like you—I will say that—and where I like—"

The gesture with which he ended the sentence was almost superfluous, in face of the change which had taken place in the aspect of the man he addressed. Wonder, doubt, hope, and again incredulity were lost at last in a recognition of the other's kindly intentions toward himself, and the prospects which they opened out before him. With a shame-faced look, and yet with a manly acceptance of his own humiliation that was not displeasing to his visitors, he turned about and pointing to the morsel of bread lying on the table before them, he said to Mr. Sedgwick:

"Do you recognize that? It is from your table, and—and—it is not the only piece I had hidden in my pockets. I had not eaten in twenty-four hours when I sat down to dinner this evening. I had no prospect of another morsel for to-morrow and—and—I was afraid of eating my fill—there were ladies—and so—and so—"

They did not let him finish. In a flash they had both taken in the room. Not an article which could be spared was anywhere visible. His dress-suit was all that remained to him of former ease and luxury. That he had retained, possibly for just such opportunities as had given him a dinner to-night. Mr. Blake understood at last, and his iron lip trembled.

"Have you no friends?" he asked. "Was it necessary to go hungry?"

"Could I ask alms or borrow what I could not pay? It was a position I was after, and positions do not come at call. Sometimes they come without it," he smiled with the dawning of his old-time grace on his handsome face, "but I find that one can see his resources go, dollar by dollar, and finally, cent by cent, in the search for employment no one considers necessary to a man like me. Perhaps if I had had less pride, had been willing to take you or any one else into my confidence, I might not have sunk to these depths of humiliation; but I had not the confidence in men which this last half hour has given me, and I went blundering on, hiding my needs and hoping against hope for some sort of result to my efforts. This pistol is not mine. I did borrow this, but I did not mean to use it, unless nature reached the point where it could stand no more. I thought the time had come to-night when I left your house, Mr. Sedgwick, suspected of theft. It seemed the last straw; but—but—a woman's look has held me back. I hesitated and—now you know the whole," said he; "that is, if you can understand why it was more possible for me to brave the contumely of such a suspicion than to open my pockets and disclose the crusts I had hidden there."

"I can understand," said Mr. Sedgwick; "but the opportunity you have given us for doing so must not be shared by others. We will undertake your justification, but it must be made in our own way and after the most careful consideration; eh, Mr. Blake?"

"Most assuredly; and if Mr. Clifford will present himself at my office early in the morning, we will first breakfast and then talk business."

Young Clifford could only hold out his hand, but when, his two friends gone, he sat in contemplation of his changed prospects, one word and one only left his lips, uttered in every inflection of tenderness, hope, and joy. "Edith! Edith! Edith!"

It was the name of the sweet young girl who had shown her faith in him at the moment when his heart was lowest and despair at its culmination.

Midnight in Beauchamp Row

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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IT WAS the last house in Beauchamp Row, and it stood several rods away from its nearest neighbor. It was a pretty house in the daytime, but owing to its deep, sloping roof and small bediamonded windows it had a lonesome look at night, nothwithstanding the crimson hall-light which shone through the leaves of its vine-covered doorway.

Ned Chivers lived in it with his six months' married bride, and as he was both a busy fellow and a gay one there were many evenings when pretty Letty Chivers sat alone until near midnight.

She was of an uncomplaining spirit, however, and said little, though there were times when both the day and evening seemed very long and married life not altogether the paradise she had expected.

On this evening—a memorable evening for her, the 24th of December, 1911—she had expected her husband to remain with her, for it was not only Christmas eve, but the night when, as manager of a large manufacturing concern, he brought up from New York the money with which to pay off the men on the next working day, and he never left her when there was any unusual amount of money in the house. But with the first glimpse she had of his figure coming up the road she saw that for some reason it was not to be thus to-night, and, indignant, alarmed almost, at the prospect of a lonesome evening under such circumstances, she ran hastily down to the gate to meet him, crying:

"Oh, Ned, you look so troubled I know you have only come home for a hurried supper. But you cannot leave me to-night. Tennie" (their only maid) "has gone for a holiday, and I never can stay in this house alone with all that." She

pointed to the small bag he carried, which, as she knew, was filled to bursting with bank notes.

He certainly looked troubled. It is hard to resist the entreaty in a young bride's uplifted face. But this time he could not help himself, and he said:

"I am dreadfully sorry, but I must ride over to Fairbanks to-night. Mr. Pierson has given me an imperative order to conclude a matter of business there, and it is very important that it should be done. I should lose my position if I neglected the matter, and no one but Hasbrouck and Suffern knows that we keep the money in the house. I have always given out that I intrusted it to Hale's safe over night."

"But I cannot stand it," she persisted. "You have never left me on these nights. That is why I let Tennie go. I will spend the evening at The Larches, or, better still, call in Mr. and Mrs. Talcott to keep me company."

But her husband did not approve of her going out or of her having company. The Larches was too far away, and as for Mr. and Mrs. Talcott, they were meddlesome people, whom he had never liked; besides, Mrs. Talcott was delicate, and the night threatened storm. Let her go to bed like a good girl, and think nothing about the money, which he would take care to put away in a very safe place.

"Or," said he, kissing her downcast face, "perhaps you would rather hide it yourself; women always have curious ideas about such things."

"Yes, let me hide it," she entreated. "The money, I mean, not the bag. Every one knows the bag. I should never dare to leave it in that." And begging him to unlock it, she began to empty it with a feverish haste that rather alarmed him, for he surveyed her anxiously and shook his head as if he dreaded the effects of this excitement upon her.

But as he saw no way out of the difficulty, he confined himself to using such soothing words as were at his command, and then, humoring her weakness, helped her to arange the bills in the place she had chosen, and restuffing the bag with old receipts till it acquired its former dimensions, he put a few bills on top to make the whole look natural, and, laughing at her white face, relocked the bag and put the key back in his pocket.

"There, dear; a notable scheme and one that should relieve your mind entirely!" he cried. "If any one should attempt burglary in my absence and should succeed in getting into a house as safely locked as this will be when I leave it, then trust to their being satisfied when they see this booty, which I shall hide where I always hide it—in the cupboard over my desk."

"And when will you be back?" she questioned, trembling in spite of herself at these preparations.

"By one o'clock if possible. Certainly by two."

"And our neighbors go to bed at ten," she murmured. But the words were low, and she was glad he did not hear them, for if it was his duty to obey the orders he had received, then it was her duty to meet the position in which it left her as bravely as she could.

At supper she was so natural that his face rapidly brightened, and it was with quite an air of cheerfulness that he rose at last to lock up the house and make such preparations as were necessary for his dismal ride over the mountains to Fairbanks. She had the supper dishes to wash up in Tennie's absence, and as she was a busy little housewife she found herself singing a snatch of song as she passed back and forth from dining-room to kitchen. He heard it, too, and smiled to himself as he bolted the windows on the ground floor and examined the locks of the three lower doors, and when he finally came into the kitchen with his greatcoat on to give her his final kiss, he had but one parting injunction to urge, and this was for her to lock and bolt the front door after him and then forget the whole matter till she heard his double knock at midnight.

She smiled and held up her ingenuous face.

"Be careful of yourself," she begged of him. "I hate this dark ride for you, and on such a night too." And she ran with him to the door to look out.

"It is certainly very dark," he responded, "but I'm to have one of Brown's safest horses. Do not worry about me. I shall do well enough, and so will you, too, or you are not the plucky little woman I have always thought you."

She laughed, but there was a choking sound in her voice that made him look at her again. But at sight of his anxiety

she recovered herself, and pointing to the clouds said earnestly:

"It's going to snow. Be careful as you ride by the gorge, Ned; it is very deceptive there in a snowstorm."

But he vowed that it would not snow before morning and giving her one final embrace he dashed down the path toward Brown's livery stable. "Oh, what is the matter with me?" she murmured to herself as his steps died out in the distance. "I never knew I was such a coward." And she paused for a moment, looking up and down the road, as if in despite of her husband's command she had the desperate idea of running away to some neighbor.

But she was too loyal for that, and smothering a sigh she retreated into the house. As she did so the first flakes fell of the storm that was not to have come till morning.

It took her an hour to get her kitchen in order, and nine o'clock struck before she was ready to sit down. She had been so busy she had not noticed how the wind had increased or how rapidly the snow was falling. But when she went to the front door for another glance up and down the road she started back, appalled at the fierceness of the gale and at the great pile of snow that had already accumulated on the doorstep.

Too delicate to breast such a wind, she saw herself robbed of her last hope of any companionship, and sighing heavily she locked and bolted the door for the night and went back into her little sitting-room, where a great fire was burning. Here she sat down, and determined, since she must pass the evening alone, to do it as cheerfully as possible, she began to sew. "Oh, what a Christmas eve!" she thought, as a picture of other homes rose before her eyes—homes in which husbands sat by wives and brothers by sisters; and a great wave of regret poured over her and a longing for something, she hardly dared say what, lest her unhappiness should acquire a sting that would leave traces beyond the passing moment.

The room in which she sat was the only one on the ground floor except the dining-room and kitchen. It therefore was used both as parlor and sitting-room, and held not only her piano, but her husband's desk.

Communicating with it was the tiny dining-room. Between the two, however, was an entry leading to a side entrance. A lamp was in this entry, and she had left it burning, as well as the one in the kitchen, that the house might look cheerful and as if the whole family were at home.

She was looking toward this entry and wondering what made it seem so dismally dark to her, when there came a faint sound from the door at its further end.

Knowing that her husband must have taken peculiar pains with the fastenings of this door, as it was the one toward the woods and therefore most accessible to wayfarers, she sat where she was, with all her faculties strained to listen. But no further sound came from that direction, and after a few minutes of silent terror she was allowing herself to believe that she had been deceived by her fears when she suddenly heard the same sound at the kitchen door, followed by a muffled knock.

Frightened now in good earnest, but still alive to the fact that the intruder was as likely to be a friend as foe, she stepped to the door, and with her hand on the lock stooped and asked boldly enough who was there. But she received no answer, and more affected by this unexpected silence than by the knock she had heard, she recoiled farther and farther till not only the width of the kitchen, but the dining-room also, lay between her and the scene of her alarm, when to her utter confusion the noise shifted again to the side of the house, and the door she thought so securely fastened swung violently open as if blown in by a fierce gust, and she saw precipitated into the entry the burly figure of a man covered with snow and shaking with the violence of the storm that seemed at once to fill the house.

Her first thought was that it was her husband come back, but before she could clear her eyes from the snow which had rushed tumultuously in, he had thrown off his outer covering and she found herself face to face with a man in whose powerful frame and cynical visage she saw little to comfort her and much to surprise and alarm.

"Ugh!" was his coarse and rather familiar greeting. "A hard night, missus! Enough to drive any man indoors.

Pardon the liberty, but I couldn't wait for you to lift the latch; the wind drove me right in."

"Was—was not the door locked?" she feebly asked, thinking he must have staved it in with his foot, which was certainly well fitted for such a task.

"Not much," he chuckled. "I s'pose you're too hospitable for that." And his eyes passed from her face to the comfortable firelight shining through the sitting-room.

"Is it refuge you want?" she demanded, suppressing as much as possible all signs of fear.

"Sure, missus—what else! A man can't live in a gale like that, specially after a tramp of twenty miles or more. Shall I shut the door for you?" he asked, with a mixture of bravado and good nature that frightened her more and more.

"I will shut it," she replied, with a half notion of escaping this sinister stranger by a flight through the night.

But one glance into the swirling snowstorm deterred her, and making the best of the alarming situation, she closed the door, but did not lock it, being now more afraid of what was inside the house than of anything left lingering without.

The man, whose clothes were dripping with water, watched her with a cynical smile, and then, without any invitation, entered the dining-room, crossed it, and moved toward the kitchen fire.

"Ugh! ugh! But it is warm here!" he cried, his nostrils dilating with an animal-like enjoyment, that in itself was repugnant to her womanly delicacy. "Do you know, missus, I shall have to stay here all night? Can't go out in that gale again; not such a fool." Then with a sly look at her trembling form and white face he insinuatingly added, "All alone, missus?"

The suddenness with which this was put, together with the leer that accompanied it, made her start. Alone? Yes, but should she acknowledge it? Would it not be better to say her husband was upstairs? The man evidently saw the struggle going on in her mind, for he chuckled to himself and called out quite boldly:

"Never mind, missus; it's all right. Just give me a bit of cold meat and a cup of tea or something, and we'll be very comfortable together. You're a slender slip of a woman to

be minding a house like this. I'll keep you company if you don't mind, leastwise until the storm lets up a bit, which ain't likely for some hours to come. Rough night, missus, rough night."

"I expect my husband home at any time," she hastened to say. And thinking she saw a change in the man's countenance at this she put on quite an air of sudden satisfaction and bounded toward the front of the house. "There! I think I hear him now," she cried.

Her motive was to gain time, and if possible to obtain the opportunity of shifting the money from the place where she had first put it into another and safer one. "I want to be able," she thought, "to swear that I have no money with me in this house. If I can only get it into my apron I will drop it outside the door into the snow bank. It will be as safe there as in the vaults it came from." And dashing into the sitting-room she made a feint of dragging down a shawl from a screen, while she secretly filled her skirt with the bills which had been put between some old pamphlets on the bookshelves.

She could hear the man grumbling in the kitchen, but he did not follow her front, and taking advantage of the moment's respite from his none too encouraging presence she unbarred the door and cheerfully called out her husband's name.

The ruse was successful. She was enabled to fling the notes where the falling flakes would soon cover them from sight, and feeling more courageous, now that the money was out of the house, she went slowly back, saying she had made a mistake, and that it was the wind she had heard.

The man gave a gruff but knowing guffaw and then resumed his watch over her, following her steps as she proceeded to set him out a meal, with a persistency that reminded her of a tiger just on the point of springing. But the inviting look of the viands with which she was rapidly setting the table soon distracted his attention, and allowing himself one grunt of satisfaction, he drew up a chair and set himself down to what to him was evidently a most savory repast.

"No beer? No ale? Nothing o' that sort, eh? Don't

keep a bar?" he growled, as his teeth closed on a huge hunk of bread.

She shook her head, wishing she had a little cold poison bottled up in a tight-looking jug.

"Nothing but tea," she smiled, astonished at her own ease of manner in the presence of this alarming guest.

"Then let's have that," he grumbled, taking the bowl she handed him, with an odd look that made her glad to retreat to the other side of the room.

"Jest listen to the howling wind," he went on between the huge mouthfuls of bread and cheese with which he was gorging himself. "But we're very comfortable, we two! We don't mind the storm, do we?"

Shocked by his familiarity and still more moved by the look of mingled inquiry and curiosity with which his eyes now began to wander over the walls and cupboards, she hurried to the window overlooking her nearest neighbor, and, lifting the shade, peered out. A swirl of snowflakes alone confronted her. She could neither see her neighbors, nor could she be seen by them. A shout from her to them would not be heard. She was as completely isolated as if the house stood in the center of a desolate western plain.

"I have no trust but in God," she murmured as she came from the window. And, nerved to meet her fate, she crossed to the kitchen.

It was now half-past ten. Two hours and a half must elapse before her husband could possibly arrive.

She set her teeth at the thought and walked resolutely into the room.

"Are you done?" she asked.

"I am, ma'am," he leered. "Do you want me to wash the dishes? I kin, and I will." And he actually carried his plate and cup to the sink, where he turned the water upon them with another loud guffaw.

"If only his fancy would take him into the pantry," she thought, "I could shut and lock the door upon him and hold him prisoner till Ned gets back."

But his fancy ended its flight at the sink, and before her hopes had fully subsided he was standing on the threshold of the sitting-room door.

"It's pretty here," he exclaimed, allowing his eye to rove again over every hiding-place within sight. "I wonder now—" He stopped. His glance had fallen on the cupboard over her husband's desk.

"Well?" she asked, anxious to break the thread of his thought, which was only too plainly mirrored in his eager countenance.

He started, dropped his eyes, and, turning, surveyed her with a momentary fierceness. But, as she did not let her own glance quail, but continued to meet his gaze with what she meant for an ingratiating smile, he subdued this outward manifestation of passion, and, chuckling to hide his embarrassment, began backing into the entry, leering in evident enjoyment of the fears he caused.

However, once in the hall he hesitated for a long time; then slowly made for the garment he had dropped on entering, and stooping, drew from underneath its folds a wicked-looking stick. Giving a kick to the coat, which sent it into a remote corner, he bestowed upon her another smile, and still carrying the stick, went slowly and reluctantly away into the kitchen.

"Oh, God Almighty, help me!" was her prayer.

There was nothing left for her now but to endure, so throwing herself into a chair, she tried to calm the beating of her heart and summon up courage for the struggle which she felt was before her. That he had come to rob and only waited to take her off her guard she now felt certain, and rapidly running over in her mind all the expedients of self-defense possible to one in her situation, she suddenly remembered the pistol which Ned kept in his desk.

Oh, why had she not thought of it before! Why had she let herself grow mad with terror when here, within reach of her hand, lay such a means of self-defense? With a feeling of joy (she had always hated pistols before and scolded Ned when he bought this one) she started to her feet and slid her hand into the drawer. But it came back empty. Ned had taken the weapon away with him.

For a moment, a surge of the bitterest feeling she had ever experienced passed over her; then she called reason to her aid and was obliged to acknowledge that the act was but

natural, and that from his standpoint he was much more likely to need it than herself. But the disappointment, coming so soon after hope, unnerved her, and she sank back in her chair, giving herself up for lost.

How long she sat there with her eyes on the door through which she momentarily expected her assailant to reappear, she never knew. She was conscious only of a sort of apathy that made movement difficult and even breathing a task. In vain she tried to change her thoughts. In vain she tried to follow her husband in fancy over the snow-covered roads and into the gorge of the mountains. Imagination failed her at this point. Do what she would, all was misty to her mind's eye, and she could not see that wandering image. There was blankness between his form and her, and no life or movement anywhere but here in the scene of her terror.

Her eyes were on a strip of rug covering the entry floor, and so strange was the condition of her mind that she found herself mechanically counting the tassels finishing off its edge, growing wroth over one that was worn, till she hated that sixth tassel and mentally determined that if she ever outlived this night she would strip them all off and be done with them.

The wind had lessened, but the air had grown cooler and the snow made a sharp sound where it struck the panes. She felt it falling, though she had cut off all view of it. It seemed to her that a pall was settling over the world and that she would soon be smothered under its folds.

Meanwhile no sound came from the kitchen. A dreadful sense of doom was creeping upon her—a sense growing in intensity till she found herself watching for the shadow of that lifted stick on the wall of the entry and almost imagined she saw the tip of it appearing.

But it was the door which again blew in, admitting another man of so threatening an aspect that she succumbed instantly before him and forgot all her former fears in this new terror.

The second intruder was a negro of powerful frame and lowering aspect, and as he came forward and stood in the doorway there was observable in his fierce and desperate countenance no attempt at the insinuation of the other, only

a fearful resolution that made her feel like a puppet before him, and drove her, almost without her volition, to her knees.

"Money? Is it money you want?" was her desperate greeting. "If so, here's my purse and here are my rings and watch. Take them and go."

But the stolid wretch did not even stretch out his hands. His eyes went beyond her, and the mingled anxiety and resolve which he displayed would have owned a stouter heart than that of this poor woman.

"Keep de trash," he growled. "I want de company's money. You've got it—two thousand dollars. Show me where it is, that's all, and I won't trouble you long after I close on it."

"But it's not in the house," she cried. "I swear it is not in the house. Do you think Mr. Chivers would leave me here alone with two thousand dollars to guard?"

But the negro, swearing that she lied, leaped into the room, and tearing open the cupboard above her husband's desk, seized the bag from the corner where they had put it.

"He brought it in this," he muttered, and tried to force the bag open, but finding this impossible he took out a heavy knife and cut a big hole in its side. Instantly there fell out the pile of old receipts with which they had stuffed it, and seeing these he stamped with rage, and flinging them at her in one great handful, rushed to the drawers below, emptied them, and, finding nothing, attacked the bookcase.

"The money is somewhere here. You can't fool me," he yelled. "I saw the spot your eyes lit on when I first came into the room. Is it behind these books?" he growled, pulling them out and throwing them helter-skelter over the floor. "Women is smart in the hiding business. Is it behind these books, I say?"

They had been, or rather had been placed between the books, but she had taken them away, as we know, and he soon began to realize that his search was bringing him nothing. Leaving the bookcase he gave the books one kick, and seizing her by the arm, shook her with a murderous glare on his strange and distorted features.

"Where's the money?" he hissed. "Tell me, or you are a goner."

He raised his heavy fist. She crouched and all seemed over, when, with a rush and cry, a figure dashed between them and he fell, struck down by the very stick she had so long been expecting to see fall upon her own head. The man who had been her terror for hours had at the moment of need acted as her protector.

. . . . . .

She must have fainted, but if so, her unconsciousness was but momentary, for when she woke again to her surroundings she found the tramp still standing over her adversary.

"I hope you don't mind, ma'am," he said, with an air of humbleness she certainly had not seen in him before, "but I think the man's dead." And he stirred with his foot the heavy figure before him.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "That would be too fearful. He's shocked, stunned; you cannot have killed him."

But the tramp was persistent. "I'm 'fraid I have," he said. "I done it before. I'm powerful strong in the biceps. But I couldn't see a man of that color frighten a lady like you. My supper was too warm in me, ma'am. Shall I throw him outside the house?"

"Yes," she said, and then, "No; let us first be sure there is no life in him." And, hardly knowing what she did, she stooped down and peered into the glassy eyes of the prostrate man.

Suddenly she turned pale—no, not pale, but ghastly, and cowering back, shook so that the tramp, into whose features a certain refinement had passed since he had acted as her protector, thought she had discovered life in those set orbs, and was stooping down to make sure that this was so, when he saw her suddenly lean forward and, impetuously plunging her hand into the negro's throat, tear open the shirt and give one look at his bared breast.

It was white.

"O God! O God!" she moaned, and lifting the head in her two hands she gave the motionless features a long and searching look. "Water!" she cried. "Bring water." But before the now obedient tramp could respond, she had torn off the woolly wig disfiguring the dead man's head, and seeing the

blond curls beneath had uttered such a shriek that it rose above the gale and was heard by her distant neighbors.

It was the head and hair of her husband.

. . . . . .

They found out afterwards that he had contemplated this theft for months; that each and every precaution necessary to the success of this most daring undertaking had been made use of and that but for the unexpected presence in the house of the tramp, he would doubtless not only have extorted the money from his wife, but have so covered up the deed by a plausible alibi as to have retained her confidence and that of his employers.

Whether the tramp killed him out of sympathy for the defenseless woman or in rage at being disappointed in his own plans has never been determined. Mrs. Chivers herself thinks he was actuated by a rude sort of gratitude.

The Little Steel Coils

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

The Little Steel Coils

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I

"A LADY to see you, sir."

I looked up and was at once impressed by the grace and beauty of the person thus introduced to me.

"Is there anything I can do to serve you?" I asked, rising.

She cast me a childlike look full of trust and candor as she seated herself in the chair I had pointed out.

"I believe so; I hope so," she earnestly assured me. "I—I am in great trouble. I have just lost my husband—but it is not that. It is the slip of paper I found on my dresser, and which—which—"

She was trembling violently and her words were fast becoming incoherent. I calmed her and asked her to relate her story just as it had happened; and after a few minutes of silent struggle she succeeded in collecting herself sufficiently to respond with some degree of connection and self-possession.

"I have been married six months. My name is Lucy Holmes. For the last few weeks my husband and I have been living in an apartment house on Fifty-ninth Street, and, as we had not a care in the world, we were very happy till Mr. Holmes was called away on business to Philadelphia. This was two weeks ago. Five days later I received an affectionate letter from him, in which he promised to come back the next day; and the news so delighted me that I accepted an invitation to the theatre from some intimate friends of ours. The next morning I naturally felt fatigued and rose late; but I was very cheerful, for I expected my husband at noon. And now comes the perplexing mystery. In the course of dressing myself I stepped to my bureau, and seeing a small

newspaper slip attached to the cushion by a pin, I drew it off and read it. It was a death notice, and my hair rose and my limbs failed me as I took in its fatal and incredible words.

"'Died this day at the Colonnade, James Forsythe De Witt Holmes. New York papers, please copy.'

"James Forsythe De Witt Holmes was my husband, and his last letter, which was at that very moment lying beside the cushion, had been dated from the Colonnade. Was I dreaming or under the spell of some frightful hallucination which led me to misread the name on the slip of paper before me? I could not determine. My head, throat, and chest seemed bound about with iron, so that I could neither speak nor breathe with freedom, and, suffering thus, I stood staring at this demoniacal bit of paper which in an instant had brought the shadow of death upon my happy life. Nor was I at all relieved when a little later I flew with the notice into a neighbor's apartment, and praying her to read it to me, found that my eyes had not deceived me and that the name was indeed my husband's and the notice one of death.

"Not from my own mind but from hers came the first suggestion of comfort.

"'It cannot be your husband who is meant,' said she; 'but some one of the same name. Your husband wrote to you yesterday, and this person must have been dead at least two days for the printed notice of his decease to have reached New York. Some one has remarked the striking similarity of names, and wishing to startle you, cut the slip out and pinned it on your cushion.'

"I certainly knew of no one inconsiderate enough to do this, but the explanation was so plausible, I at once embraced it and sobbed aloud in my relief. But in the midst of my rejoicing I heard the bell ring in my apartment, and, running thither, encountered a telegraph boy holding in his outstretched hand the yellow envelope which so often bespeaks death or disaster. The sight took my breath away. Summoning my maid, whom I saw hastening toward me from an inner room, I begged her to open the telegram for me. Sir, I saw in her face, before she had read the first line, a confirmation of my very worst fears. My husband was—"

The young widow, choked with her emotions, paused, recovered herself for the second time, and then went on.

"I had better show you the telegram."

Taking it from her pocketbook, she held it toward me. I read it at a glance. It was short, simple, and direct:

"Come at once. Your husband found dead in his room this morning. Doctors say heart disease. Please telegraph."

"You see it says this morning," she explained, placing her delicate finger on the word she so eagerly quoted. "That means a week ago Wednesday, the same day on which the printed slip recording his death was found on my cushion. Do you not see something very strange in this?"

I did; but, before I ventured to express myself on this subject, I desired her to tell me what she had learned in her visit to Philadelphia.

Her answer was simple and straightforward.

"But little more than you find in this telegram. He died in his room. He was found lying on the floor near the bell-button, which he had evidently risen to touch. One hand was clenched on his chest, but his face wore a peaceful look, as if death had come too suddenly to cause him much suffering. His bed was undisturbed; he had died before retiring, possibly in the act of packing his trunk, for it was found nearly ready for the expressman. Indeed, there was every evidence of his intention to leave on an early morning train. He had even desired to be awakened at six o'clock; and it was his failure to respond to the summons of the bellboy which led to so early a discovery of his death. He had never complained of any distress in breathing, and we had always considered him a perfectly healthy man; but there was no reason for assigning any other cause than heart failure to his sudden death, and so the burial certificate was made out to that effect, and I was allowed to bring him home and bury him in our vault at Woodlawn. But"—and here her earnestness dried up the tears which had been flowing freely during this recital of her husband's lonely death and sad burial—"do you not think an investigation should be made into a death preceded by a false obituary notice? For I found when I was in Philadelphia that no paragraph such as I had found pinned

to my cushion had been inserted in any paper there, nor had any other man of the same name ever registered at the Colonnade, much less died there."

"Have you this notice with you?" I asked.

She immediately produced it, and while I was glancing it over remarked:

"Some persons would give a superstitious explanation to the whole matter; think I had received a supernatural warning and been satisfied with what they would call a spiritual manifestation. But I have not a bit of such folly in my composition. Living hands set up the type and printed the words which gave me so deathly a shock; and hands, with a real purpose in them, cut it from the paper and pinned it to my cushion for me to see when I woke on that fatal morning. But whose hands? That is what I want you to discover."

I had caught the fever of her suspicions long before this and now felt justified in showing my interest.

"First, let me ask," said I, "who has access to your rooms besides your maid?"

"No one; absolutely no one."

"And what of her?"

"She is innocence herself. She is no common housemaid, but a girl my mother brought up, who for love of me consents to do such work in the household as my simple needs require."

"I should like to see her."

"There is no objection to your doing so; but you will gain nothing by it. I have already talked the subject over with her a dozen times and she is as much puzzled by it as I am myself. She says she cannot see how any one could have found an entrance to my room during my sleep, as the doors were all locked. Yet, as she very naturally observes, some one must have done so, for she was in my bedroom herself just before I returned from the theatre, and can swear, if necessary, that no such slip of paper was to be seen on my cushion at that time, for her duties led her directly to my bureau and kept her there for full five minutes."

"And you believed her?" I suggested.

"Implicitly."

"In what direction, then, do your suspicions turn?"

"Alas! in no direction. That is the trouble. I don't know whom to mistrust. It was because I was told that you had the credit of seeing light where others can see nothing but darkness that I have sought your aid in this emergency. For the uncertainty surrounding this matter is killing me and will make my sorrow quite unendurable if I cannot obtain relief from it."

"I do not wonder," I began, struck by the note of truth in her tones. "And I shall certainly do what I can for you. But before we go any further, let us examine this scrap of newspaper and see what we can make out of it."

I had already noted two or three points in connection with it to which I now proceeded to direct her attention.

"Have you compared this notice," I pursued, "with such others as you find every day in the papers?"

"No," was her eager answer. "Is it not like them all—"

"Read," was my quiet interruption. " 'On this day at the Colonnade'—on what day? The date is usually given in all the bona fide notices I have seen."

"Is it?" she asked, her eyes, moist with unshed tears, opening widely in her astonishment.

"Look in the papers on your return home and see. Then the print. Observe that the type is identical on both sides of this make-believe clipping, while in fact there is always a perceptible difference between that used in the obituary column and that to be found in the columns devoted to other matter. Notice also," I continued, holding up the scrap of paper between her and the light, "that the alignment on one side is not exactly parallel with that on the other; a discrepancy which would not exist if both sides had been printed on a newspaper press. These facts lead me to conclude, first, that the effort to match the type exactly was the mistake of a man who tried to do too much; and, secondly, that one of the sides at least, presumably that containing the obituary notice, was printed on a hand-press, on the blank side of a piece of galley proof picked up in some newspaper office."

"Let me see." And stretching out her hand with the utmost eagerness, she took the slip and turned it over. Instantly a change took place in her countenance. She sank

back in her seat and a blush of manifest confusion suffused her cheeks. "Oh!" she exclaimed; "what will you think of me! I brought this scrap of print into the house *myself,* and it was *I* who pinned it on the cushion with my own hands! I remember it now. The sight of those words recalls the whole occurrence."

"Then there is one mystery less for us to solve," I remarked, somewhat dryly.

"Do you think so?" she protested, with a deprecatory look. "For me the mystery deepens, and becomes every minute more serious. It is true that I brought this scrap of newspaper into the house, and that it had, then as now, the notice of my husband's death upon it, but the time of my bringing it in was Tuesday night, and he was not found dead till Wednesday morning."

"A discrepancy worth noting," I remarked.

"Involving a mystery of some importance," she concluded.

I agreed to that.

"And since we have discovered how the slip came into your room, we can now proceed to the clearing up of this mystery," I observed. "You can, of course, inform me where you procured this clipping which you say you brought into the house?"

"Yes. You may think it strange, but when I alighted from the carriage that night, a man on the sidewalk put this tiny scrap of paper into my hand. It was done so mechanically that it made no more impression on my mind than the thrusting of an advertisement upon me. Indeed, I supposed it was an advertisement, and I only wonder that I retained it in my hand at all. But that I did do so, and that, in a moment of abstraction, I went so far as to pin it to my cushion, is evident from the fact that a vague memory remains in my mind of having read this recipe which you see printed on the reverse side of the paper."

"It was the recipe, then, and not the obituary notice which attracted your attention the night before?"

"Probably, but in pinning it to the cushion, it was the obituary notice that chanced to come uppermost. Oh, why should I not have remembered this till now! Can you understand my forgetting a matter of so much importance?"

"Yes," I allowed, after a momentary consideration of her ingenuous countenance. "The words you read in the morning were so startling that they disconnected themselves from those you had carelessly glanced at the night before."

"That is it," she replied; "and since then I have had eyes for the one side only. How could I think of the other? But who could have printed this thing and who was the man who put it into my hand? He looked like a beggar, but— Oh!" she suddenly exclaimed, her cheeks flushing scarlet and her eyes flashing with a feverish, almost alarming glitter.

"What is it now?" I asked. "Another recollection?"

"Yes." She spoke so low I could hardly hear her. "He coughed and—"

"And what" I encouragingly suggested, seeing that she was under some new and overwhelming emotion.

"That cough had a familiar sound, now that I think of it. It was like that of a friend who— But no, no; I will not wrong him by any false surmises. He would stoop to much, but not to that; yet—"

The flush on her cheeks had died away, but the two vivid spots which remained showed the depth of her excitement.

"Do you think," she suddenly asked, "that a man out of revenge might plan to frighten me by a false notice of my husband's death, and that God to punish him, made the notice a prophecy?"

"I think a man influenced by the spirit of revenge might do almost anything," I answered, purposely ignoring the latter part of her question.

"But I always considered him a good man. At least I never looked upon him as a wicked one. Every other beggar we meet has a cough; and yet," she added after a moment's pause, "if it was not he who gave me this mortal shock, who was it? He is the only person in the world I ever wronged."

"Had you not better tell me his name?" I suggested.

"No, I am in too great doubt. I should hate to do him a second injury."

"You cannot injure him if he is innocent. My methods are very safe."

"If I could forget his cough! but it had that peculiar catch in it that I remembered so well in the cough of John

Graham. I did not pay any especial heed to it at the time. Old days and old troubles were far enough from my thoughts; but now that my suspicions are raised, that low, choking sound comes back to me in a strangely persistent way, and I seem to see a well-remembered form in the stooping figure of this beggar. Oh, I hope the good God will forgive me if I attribute to this disappointed man a wickedness he never committed."

"Who is John Graham?" I urged, "and what was the nature of the wrong you did him?"

She rose, cast me one appealing glance, and perceiving that I meant to have her whole story, turned toward the fire and stood warming her feet before the hearth, with her face turned away from my gaze.

"I was once engaged to marry him," she began. "Not because I loved him, but because we were very poor—I mean my mother and myself—and he had a home and seemed both good and generous. The day came when we were to be married—this was in the West, way out in Kansas—and I was even dressed for the wedding, when a letter came from my uncle here, a rich uncle, very rich, who had never had anything to do with my mother since her marriage, and in it he promised me fortune and everything else desirable in life if I would come to him, unencumbered by any foolish ties. Think of it! And I within half an hour of marriage with a man I had never loved and now suddenly hated. The temptation was overwhelming, and, heartless as my conduct may appear to you, I succumbed to it. Telling my lover that I had changed my mind, I dismissed the minister when he came, and announced my intention of proceeding East as soon as possible. Mr. Graham was simply paralyzed by his disappointment, and during the few days which intervened before my departure, I was haunted by his face, which was like that of a man who had died from some overwhelming shock. But when I was once free of the town, especially after I arrived in New York, I forgot alike his misery and himself. Everything I saw was so beautiful! Life was so full of charm, and my uncle so delighted with me and everything I did! Then there was James Holmes, and after I had seen him— But I cannot talk of that. We loved each

other, and under the surprise of this new delight how could I be expected to remember the man I had left behind me in that barren region in which I had spent my youth? But he did not forget the misery I had caused him. He followed me to New York; and on the morning I was married found his way into the house, and mixing with the wedding guests, suddenly appeared before me just as I was receiving the congratulations of my friends. At sight of him I experienced all the terror he had calculated upon causing, but remembering our old relations and my new position, I assumed an air of apparent haughtiness. This irritated John Graham. Flushing with anger, and ignoring my imploring look, he cried peremptorily, 'Present me to your husband!' and I felt forced to present him. But his name produced no effect upon Mr. Holmes. I had never told him of my early experience with this man, and John Graham, perceiving this, cast me a bitter glance of disdain and passed on, muttering between his teeth, 'False to me and false to him! Your punishment be upon you!' and I felt as if I had been cursed."

She stopped here, moved by emotions readily to be understood. Then with quick impetuosity she caught up the thread of her story and went on.

"That was six months ago; and again I forgot. My mother died and my husband soon absorbed my every thought. How could I dream that this man, who was little more than a memory to me and scarcely that, was secretly planning mischief against me? Yet this scrap about which we have talked so much may have been the work of his hands; and even my husband's death—"

She did not finish, but her face, which was turned toward me, spoke volumes.

"Your husband's death shall be inquired into," I assured her.

And she, exhausted by the excitement of her discoveries, asked that she might be excused from further discussion of the subject at that time.

As I had no wish, myself, to enter any more fully into the matter just then, I readily acceded to her request, and the pretty widow left me.

II

Obviously the first fact to be settled was whether Mr. Holmes had died from purely natural causes. I accordingly busied myself the next few days with the question, and was fortunate enough to so interest the proper authorities that an order was issued for the exhumation and examination of the body.

The result was disappointing. No traces of poison were to be found in the stomach nor was there to be seen on the body any mark of violence with the exception of a minute prick upon one of his thumbs.

This speck was so small that it escaped every eye but my own.

The authorities assuring the widow that the doctor's certificate given her in Philadelphia was correct, the body was again interred. But I was not satisfied; and confident that this death had not been a natural one, I entered upon one of those secret and prolonged investigations which for so many years have constituted the pleasure of my life. First, I visited the Colonnade in Philadelphia, and being allowed to see the room in which Mr. Holmes died, went through it carefully. As it had not been used since that time I had some hopes of coming upon a clue.

But it was a vain hope, and the only result of my journey to this place was the assurance I received that the gentleman had spent the entire evening preceding his death in his own room, where he had been brought several letters and one small package, the latter coming by mail. With this one point gained—if it was a point—I went back to New York.

Calling on Mrs. Holmes, I asked her if, while her husband was away, she had sent him anything besides letters, and upon her replying to the contrary, requested to know if in her visit to Philadelphia she had noted among her husband's effects anything that was new or unfamiliar to her. "For he received a package while there," I explained, "and though its contents may have been perfectly harmless, it is just as well for us to be assured of this before going any further."

"Oh, you think, then, he was really the victim of some secret violence."

"We have no proof of it," I said. "On the contrary, we are assured that he died from natural causes. But the incident of the newspaper slip outweighs, in my mind, the doctor's conclusions, and until the mystery surrounding that obituary notice has been satisfactorily explained by its author I shall hold to the theory that your husband has been made away with in some strange and seemingly unaccountable manner, which it is our duty to bring to light."

"You are right! You are right! Oh, John Graham!"

She was so carried away by this plain expression of my belief that she forgot the question I had put to her.

"You have not said whether or not you found anything among your husband's effects that can explain this mystery," I suggested.

She at once became attentive.

"Nothing," said she; "his trunks were already packed and his bag nearly so. There were a few things lying about the room which I saw thrust into the latter. Would you like to look through them? I have not had the heart to open the bag since I came back."

As this was exactly what I wished, I said as much, and she led me into a small room, against the wall of which stood a trunk with a traveling-bag on top of it. Opening the latter, she spread the contents out on the trunk.

"I know all these things," she sadly murmured, the tears welling in her eyes.

"This?" I inquired, lifting up a bit of coiled wire with two or three rings dangling from it.

"No; why, what is that?"

"It looks like a puzzle of some kind."

"Then it is of no consequence. My husband was forever amusing himself over some such contrivance. All his friends knew how well he liked these toys and frequently sent them to him. This one evidently reached him from Philadelphia."

Meanwhile I was eying the bit of wire curiously. It was undoubtedly a puzzle, but it had appendages to it that I did not understand.

"It is more than ordinarily complicated," I observed, mov-

ing the rings up and down in a vain endeavor to work them off.

"The better he would like it," she said.

I kept working with the rings. Suddenly I gave a painful start. A little prong in the handle of the toy had started out and pierced me.

"You had better not handle it," said I, and laid it down. But the next moment I took it up again and put it in my pocket. The prick made by this treacherous bit of mechanism was in or near the same place on my thumb as the one I had noticed on the hand of the deceased Mr. Holmes.

There was a fire in the room, and before proceeding further I cauterized that prick with the end of a red-hot poker. Then I made my adieux to Mrs. Holmes and went immediately to a chemist friend of mine.

"Test the end of this bit of steel for me," said I. "I have reason to believe it carries with it a deadly poison."

He took the toy, promising to subject it to every test possible and let me know the result. Then I went home. I felt ill, or imagined I did, which under the circumstances was almost as bad.

Next day, however, I was quite well, with the exception of a certain inconvenience in my thumb. But not till the following week did I receive the chemist's report. It overthrew my whole theory. He found nothing, and returned me the bit of steel.

But I was not convinced.

"I will hunt up this John Graham," thought I, "and study him."

But this was not so easy a task as it may appear. As Mrs. Holmes possessed no clue to the whereabouts of her quondam lover, I had nothing to aid me in my search for him, save her rather vague description of his personal appearance and the fact that he was constantly interrupted in speaking by a low, choking cough. However, my natural perseverance carried me through. After seeing and interviewing a dozen John Grahams without result, I at last lit upon a man of that name who presented a figure of such vivid unrest and showed such a desperate hatred of his fellows, that I began to entertain hopes of his being the person

I was in search of. But determined to be sure of this before proceeding further, I confided my suspicions to Mrs. Holmes, and induced her to accompany me down to a certain spot on the "Elevated" from which I had more than once seen this man go by to his usual lounging place in Printing House Square.

She showed great courage in doing this, for she had such a dread of him that she was in a state of nervous excitement from the moment she left her house, feeling sure that she would attract his attention and thus risk a disagreeable encounter. But she might have spared herself these fears. He did not even glance up in passing us, and it was mainly by his walk she recognized him. But she did recognize him; and this nerved me at once to set about the formidable task of fixing upon him a crime which was not even admitted as a fact by the authorities.

He was a man-about-town, living, to all appearances, by his wits. He was to be seen mostly in the downtown portions of the city, standing for hours in front of some newspaper office, gnawing at his finger-ends, and staring at the passers-by with a hungry look alarming to the timid and provoking alms from the benevolent. Needless to say that he rejected the latter expression of sympathy with angry contempt.

His face was long and pallid, his cheek-bones high, and his mouth bitter and resolute in expression. He wore neither beard nor mustache, but made up for their lack by an abundance of light-brown hair, which hung very nearly to his shoulders. He stooped in standing, but as soon as he moved, showed decision and a certain sort of pride which caused him to hold his head high and his body more than usually erect. With all these good points his appearance was decidedly sinister, and I did not wonder that Mrs. Holmes feared him.

My next move was to accost him. Pausing before the doorway in which he stood, I addressed him some trivial question. He answered me with sufficient politeness, but with a grudging attention which betrayed the hold which his own thoughts had upon him. He coughed while speaking, and his eye, which for a moment rested on mine, produced an impression upon me for which I was hardly prepared, great as

was my prejudice against him. There was such an icy composure in it; the composure of an envenomed nature conscious of its superiority to all surprises. As I lingered to study him more closely, the many dangerous qualities of the man became more and more apparent to me; and convinced that to proceed further without deep and careful thought would be to court failure where triumph would set me up for life, I gave up all present attempt at enlisting him in conversation and went away in an inquiring and serious mood.

In fact, my position was a peculiar one, and the problem I had set for myself one of unusual difficulty. Only by means of some extraordinary device such as is seldom resorted to by the police of this or any other nation, could I hope to arrive at the secret of this man's conduct, and triumph in a matter which to all appearance was beyond human penetration.

But what device? I knew of none, nor through two days and nights of strenuous thought did I receive the least light on the subject. Indeed, my mind seemed to grow more and more confused the more I urged it into action. I failed to get inspiration indoors or out; and feeling my health suffer from the constant irritation of my recurring disappointment, I resolved to take a day off and carry myself and my perplexities into the country.

I did so. Governed by an impulse which I did not then understand, I went to a small town in New Jersey and entered the first house on which I saw the sign "Room to Let." The result was most fortunate. No sooner had I crossed the threshold of the neat and homely apartment thrown open to my use, than it recalled a room in which I had slept two years before and in which I had read a little book I was only too glad to remember at this moment. Indeed, it seemed as if a veritable inspiration had come to me through this recollection, for though the tale to which I allude was a simple child's story written for moral purposes, it contained an idea which promised to be invaluable to me at this juncture. Indeed, by means of it, I believed myself to have solved the problem that was puzzling me, and, relieved beyond expression, I paid for the night's lodging I had now determined to forego, and returned immediately to

New York, having spent just fifteen minutes in the town where I had received this happy inspiration.

My first step on entering the city was to order a dozen steel coils made similar to the one which I still believed answerable for James Holmes's death. My next to learn as far as possible all of John Graham's haunts and habits. At a week's end I had the springs and knew almost as well as he did himself where he was likely to be found at all times of the day and night. I immediately acted upon this knowledge. Assuming a slight disguise, I repeated my former stroll through Printing House Square, looking into each doorway as I passed. John Graham was in one of them, staring in his old way at the passing crowd, but evidently seeing nothing but the images formed by his own disordered brain. A manuscript roll stuck out of his breast-pocket, and from the way his nervous fingers fumbled with it, I began to understand the restless glitter of his eyes, which were as full of wretchedness as any eyes I have ever seen.

Entering the doorway where he stood, I dropped at his feet one of the small steel coils with which I was provided. He did not see it. Stopping near him, I directed his attention to it by saying:

"Pardon me, but did I not see something drop out of your hand?"

He started, glanced at the seemingly inoffensive toy I had pointed out, and altered so suddenly and so vividly that it became instantly apparent that the surprise I had planned for him was fully as keen and searching a one as I had anticipated. Recoiling sharply, he gave me a quick look, then glanced down again at his feet as if half expecting to find the object of his terror gone. But, perceiving it still lying there, he crushed it viciously with his heel, and uttering some incoherent words dashed impetuously from the building.

Confident that he would regret this hasty impulse and return, I withdrew a few steps and waited. And sure enough, in less than five minutes he came slinking back. Picking up the coil with more than one sly look about, he examined it closely. Suddenly he gave a sharp cry and went staggering out. Had he discovered that the seeming puzzle possessed

the same invisible spring which had made the one handled by James Holmes so dangerous?

Certain as to the place he would be found next, I made a short cut to an obscure little saloon in Nassau Street, where I took up my stand in a spot convenient for seeing without being seen. In ten minutes he was standing at the bar asking for a drink.

"Whisky!" he cried. "Straight."

It was given him, but as he set the empty glass down on the counter he saw lying before him another of the steel springs, and was so confounded by the sight that the proprietor, who had put it there at my instigation, thrust out his hand toward him as if half afraid he would fall.

"Where did that—that *thing* come from?" stammered John Graham, ignoring the other's gesture and pointing with a trembling hand at the insignificant bit of wire between them.

"Didn't it drop from your coat-pocket?" inquired the proprietor. "It wasn't lying here before you came in."

With a horrible oath the unhappy man turned and fled from the place. I lost sight of him after that for three hours, then I suddenly came upon him again. He was walking uptown with a set purpose in his face that made him look more dangerous than ever. Of course I followed him, expecting him to turn towards Fifty-ninth Street, but at the corner of Madison Avenue and Forty-seventh Street he changed his mind and dashed toward Third Avenue. At Park Avenue he faltered and again turned north, walking for several blocks as if the fiends were behind him. I began to think that he was but attempting to walk off his excitement, when, at a sudden rushing sound in the cut beside us, he stopped and trembled. An express train was shooting by. As it disappeared in the tunnel beyond, he looked about him with a blanched face and wandering eye; but his glance did not turn my way, or, if it did, he failed to attach any meaning to my near presence.

He began to move on again and this time toward the bridge spanning the cut. I followed him very closely. In the center of it he paused and looked down at the track beneath him. Another train was approaching. As it came

near he trembled from head to foot, and, catching at the railing against which he leaned, was about to make a quick move forward when a puff of smoke arose from below and sent him staggering backward, gasping with a terror I could hardly understand till I saw that the smoke had taken the form of a spiral and was sailing away before him in what to his disordered imagination must have looked like a gigantic image of the coil with which twice before on this day he had found himself confronted.

It may have been chance and it may have been providence; but whichever it was it saved him. He could not face that semblance of his haunting thought; and turning away he cowered down on the neighboring curbstone, where he sat for several minutes, with his head buried in his hands; when he arose again he was his own daring and sinister self. Knowing that he was now too much master of his faculties to ignore me any longer, I walked quickly away and left him. I knew where he would be at six o'clock and had already engaged a table at the same restaurant. It was seven, however, before he put in an appearance, and by this time he was looking more composed. There was a reckless air about him, however, which was perhaps only noticeable to me; for none of the habitués of this especial restaurant were entirely without it; wild eyes and unkempt hair being in the majority.

I let him eat. The dinner he ordered was simple and I had not the heart to interrupt his enjoyment of it.

But when he had finished and came to pay, then I allowed the shock to come. Under the bill which the waiter laid at the side of his plate was the inevitable steel coil; and it produced even more than its usual effect. I own I felt sorry for him.

He did not dash from the place, however, as he had from the liquor saloon. A spirit of resistance had seized him and he demanded to know where this object of his fear had come from. No one could tell him (or would). Whereupon he began to rave and would certainly have done himself or somebody else an injury if he had not been calmed by a man almost as wild-looking as himself. Paying his bill, but vowing he would never enter the place again, he went out, clay

white, but with the swaggering air of a man who had just asserted himself.

He drooped, however, as soon as he reached the street, and I had no difficulty in following him to a certain gambling den, where he gained three dollars and lost five. From there he went to his lodgings in West Tenth Street.

I did not follow him. He had passed through many deep and wearing emotions since noon, and I had not the heart to add another to them.

But late the next day I returned to this house and rang the bell. It was already dusk, but there was light enough for me to notice the unrepaired condition of the iron railings on either side of the old stoop and to compare this abode of decayed grandeur with the spacious and elegant apartment in which pretty Mrs. Holmes mourned the loss of her young husband. Had any such comparison ever been made by the unhappy John Graham, as he hurried up these battered steps into the dismal halls beyond?

In answer to my summons there came to the door a young woman to whom I had but to intimate my wish to see Mr. Graham for her to let me in with the short announcement:

"Top floor, back room! Door open, he's out; door shut, he's in."

As an open door meant liberty to enter, I lost no time in following the direction of her finger, and presently found myself in a low attic chamber overlooking an acre of roofs. A fire had been lighted in the open grate, and the flickering red beams danced on ceiling and walls with a cheeriness greatly in contrast to the nature of the business which had led me there. As they also served to light the room, I proceeded to make myself at home; and drawing up a chair, sat down at the fireplace in such a way as to conceal myself from any one entering the door.

In less than half an hour he came in.

He was in a state of high emotion. His face was flushed and his eyes burning. Stepping rapidly forward, he flung his hat on the table in the middle of the room, with a curse that was half cry and half groan. Then he stood silent and I had an opportunity of noting how haggard he had grown in the short time which had elapsed since I had seen him

last. But the interval of his inaction was short, and in a moment he flung up his arms with a loud "Curse her!" that rang through the narrow room and betrayed the source of his present frenzy. Then he again stood still, grating his teeth and working his hands in a way terribly suggestive of the murderer's instinct. But not for long. He saw something that attracted his attention on the table, a something upon which my eyes had long before been fixed, and starting forward with a fresh and quite different display of emotion, he caught up what looked like a roll of manuscript and began to tear it open.

"Back again! Always back!" wailed from his lips; and he gave the roll a toss that sent from its midst a small object which he no sooner saw than he became speechless and reeled back. It was another of the steel coils.

"Good God!" fell at last from his stiff and working lips. "Am I mad or has the devil joined in the pursuit against me? I cannot eat, I cannot drink, but this diabolical spring starts up before me. It is here, there, everywhere. The visible sign of my guilt; the—the—" He had stumbled back upon my chair, and turning, saw me.

I was on my feet at once, and noting that he was dazed by the shock of my presence, I slid quietly between him and the door.

The movement roused him. Turning upon me with a sarcastic smile in which was concentrated the bitterness of years, he briefly said:

"So I am caught! Well, there has to be an end to men as well as to things, and I am ready for mine. She turned me away from her door to-day, and after the hell of that moment I don't much fear any other."

"You had better not talk," I admonished him. "All that falls from you now will only tell against you on your trial."

He broke into a harsh laugh. "And do you think I care for that? That having been driven by a woman's perfidy into crime I am going to bridle my tongue and keep down the words which are my only safeguard from insanity? No, no; while my miserable breath lasts I will curse her, and if the halter is to cut short my words, it shall be with her name blistering my lips."

I attempted to speak, but he would not give me an opportunity. The passion of weeks had found vent and he rushed on recklessly:

"I went to her house to-day. I wanted to see her in her widow's weeds; I wanted to see her eyes red with weeping over a grief which owed its bitterness to me. But she would not grant me admittance. She had me thrust from her door, and I shall never know how deeply the iron has sunk into her soul. But"—and here his face showed a sudden change—"I shall see her if I am tried for murder. She will be in the court room—on the witness stand—"

"Doubtless," I interjected; but his interruption came quickly and with vehement passion.

"Then I am ready. Welcome trial, conviction, death, even. To confront her eye to eye is all I wish. She shall never forget it, never!"

"Then you do not deny—" I began.

"I deny nothing," he returned, and held out his hands with a grim gesture. "How can I, when there falls from everything I touch the devilish thing which took away the life I hated?"

"Have you anything more to say or do before you leave these rooms?" I asked.

He shook his head, and then, bethinking himself, pointed to the roll of paper which he had flung on the table.

"Burn that!' he cried.

I took up the roll and looked at it. It was the manuscript of a poem in blank verse.

"I have been with it into a dozen newspaper and magazine offices," he explained with great bitterness. "Had I succeeded in getting a publisher for it I might have forgotten my wrongs and tried to build up a new life on the ruins of the old. But they would not have it, none of them; so I say, burn it! that no memory of me may remain in this miserable world."

"Keep to the facts!" I severely retorted. "It was while carrying this poem from one newspaper to another that you secured that bit of print upon the blank side of which yourself printed the obituary notice with which you savored your revenge upon the woman who had disappointed you."

"You know that? Then you know where I got the poison with which I tipped the silly toy with which that weak man fooled away his life?"

"No," said I, "I do not know where you got it. I merely know it was no common poison bought at a druggist's, or from any ordinary chemist."

"It was woorali; the deadly, secret woorali. I got it from —but that is another man's secret. You will never hear from me anything that will compromise a friend. I got it, that is all. One drop, but it killed my man."

The satisfaction, the delight, which he threw into these words are beyond description. As they left his lips a jet of flame from the neglected fire shot up and threw his figure for one instant into bold relief upon the lowering ceiling; then it died out, and nothing but the twilight dusk remained in the room and on the countenance of this doomed and despairing man.

The Staircase at Heart's Delight

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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IN THE spring of 18—, the attention of the New York police was attracted by the many cases of well-known men found drowned in the various waters surrounding the lower portion of our great city. Among these may be mentioned the name of Elwood Henderson, the noted tea merchant, whose remains were washed ashore at Redhook Point; and of Christopher Bigelow, who was picked up off Governor's Island after having been in the water for five days, and of another well-known millionaire whose name I cannot now recall, but who, I remember, was seen to walk toward the East River one March evening, and was not met with again till the 5th of April, when his body floated into one of the docks near Peck's Slip.

As it seemed highly improbable that there should have been a concerted action among so many wealthy and distinguished men to end their lives within a few weeks of each other, and all by the same method of drowning, we soon became suspicious that a more serious verdict than that of suicide should have been rendered in the case of Henderson, Bigelow, and the other gentleman I have mentioned. Yet one fact, common to all these cases, pointed so conclusively to deliberate intention on the part of the sufferers that we hesitated to take action.

This was, that upon the body of each of the above-mentioned persons there were found, not only valuables in the shape of money and jewelry, but papers and memoranda of a nature calculated to fix the identity of the drowned man, in case the water should rob him of his personal characteristics. Consequently, we could not ascribe these deaths

to a desire for plunder on the part of some unknown person.

I was a young man in those days, and full of ambition. So, though I said nothing, I did not let this matter drop when the others did, but kept my mind persistently upon it and waited, with odd results as you will hear, for another victim to be reported at police headquarters.

Meantime I sought to discover some bond or connection between the several men who had been found drowned, which would serve to explain their similar fate. But all my efforts in this direction were fruitless. There was no bond between them, and the matter remained for a while an unsolved mystery.

Suddenly one morning a clue was placed, not in my hands, but in those of a superior official who at that time exerted a great influence over the whole force. He was sitting in his private room, when there was ushered into his presence a young man of a dissipated but not unprepossessing appearance, who, after a pause of marked embarrassment, entered upon the following story:

"I don't know whether or no I should offer an excuse for the communication I am about to make; but the matter I have to relate is simply this: Being hard up last night (for though a rich man's son I often lack money), I went to a certain pawnshop in the Bowery where I had been told I could raise money on my prospects. This place—you may see it some time, so I will not enlarge upon it—did not strike me favorably; but, being very anxious for a certain definite sum of money, I wrote my name in a book which was brought to me from some unknown quarter and proceeded to follow the young woman who attended me into what she was pleased to call her good master's private office.

"He may have been a good master, but he was anything but a good man. In short, sir, when he found out who I was, and how much I needed money, he suggested that I should make an appointment with my father at a place he called Groll's in Grand Street, where, said he, 'your little affair will be arranged, and you made a rich man within thirty days. That is,' he slyly added, 'unless your father has already made a will, disinheriting you.'

"I was shocked, sir, shocked beyond all my powers of concealment, not so much at his words, which I hardly understood, as at his looks, which had a world of evil suggestion in them; so I raised my fist and would have knocked him down, only that I found two young fellows at my elbows, who held me quiet for five minutes, while the old fellow talked to me. He asked me if I came to him on a fool's errand or really to get money; and when I admitted that I had cherished hopes of obtaining a clear two thousand dollars from him, he coolly replied that he knew of but one way in which I could hope to get such an amount, and that if I was too squeamish to adopt it, I had made a mistake in coming to his shop, which was no missionary institution, etc., etc.

"Not wishing to irritate him, for there was menace in his eye, I asked, with a certain weak show of being sorry for my former heat, whereabouts in Grand Street I should find this Groll.

"The retort was quick. 'Groll is not his name,' said he, 'and Grand Street is not where you are to go to find him. I threw out a bait to see if you would snap at it, but I find you timid, and therefore advise you to drop the matter entirely.'

"I was quite willing to do so, and answered him to this effect; whereupon, with a side glance I did not understand, but which made me more or less uneasy in regard to his intentions toward me, he motioned to the men who held my arms to let go their hold, which they at once did.

" 'We have your signature,' growled the old man as I went out. 'If you peach on us or trouble us in any way we will show it to your father and that will put an end to all your hopes of future fortune.' Then raising his voice, he shouted to the girl in the outer office, 'Let the young man see what he has signed.'

"She smiled and again brought forward the book in which I had so recklessly placed my name, and there at the top of the page I read these words: 'For moneys received, I agree to notify Rube Goodman, within the month, of the death of my father, so that he may recover from me, without loss of time, the sum of ten thousand dollars as his part of the amount I am bound to receive as my father's heir.'

"The sight of these lines knocked me hollow. But I am less of a coward morally than physically, and I determined to acquaint my father at once with what I had done, and get his advice as to whether or not I should inform the police of my adventure. He heard me with more consideration than I expected, but insisted that I should immediately make known to you my experience in this Bowery pawnbroker's shop."

The officer, highly interested, took down the young man's statement in writing, and, after getting a more accurate description of the house itself, allowed his visitor to go.

Fortunately for me, I was in the building at the time, and was able to respond when a man was called up to investigate this matter. Thinking that I saw a connection between it and the various mysterious deaths of which I have previously spoken, I entered into the affair with much spirit. But, wishing to be sure that my possibly unwarranted conclusions were correct, I took pains to inquire, before proceeding upon my errand, into the character of the heirs who had inherited the property of Elwood Henderson and Christopher Bigelow, and found that in each case there was one among the rest who was well known for his profligacy and reckless expenditure.

It was a significant discovery, and increased, if possible, my interest in running down this nefarious trafficker in the lives of wealthy men.

Knowing that I could hope for no success in my character of detective, I made an arrangement with the father of the young gentleman before alluded to, by which I was to enter the pawnshop as an emissary of the latter. Accordingly, I appeared there, one dull November afternoon, in the garb of a certain Western sporting man, who, for a consideration, allowed me the temporary use of his name and credentials.

Entering beneath the three golden balls, with the swagger and general air of ownership I thought most likely to impose upon the self-satisfied female who presided over the desk, I asked to see her boss.

"On your own business?" she queried, glancing with suspicion at my short coat, which was rather more showy than elegant.

"No," I returned, "not on my own business, but on that of a young gent—"

"Any one whose name is written here?" she interposed, reaching toward me the famous book, over the top of which, however, she was careful to lay her arm.

I glanced down the page she had opened and instantly detected that of the young gentleman on whose behalf I was supposed to be there, and nodded "Yes," with all the assurance of which I was capable.

"Come, then," said she, ushering me without more ado into a den of discomfort where sat a man with a great beard and such heavy overhanging eyebrows that I could hardly detect the twinkle of his eyes, keen and incisive as they were.

Smiling upon him, but not in the same way I had upon the girl, I glanced behind me at the open door, and above me at the partitions, which failed to reach the ceiling. Then I shook my head and drew a step nearer.

"I have come," I insinuatingly whispered, "on behalf of a certain party who left this place in a huff a day or so ago, but who since then has had time to think the matter over, and has sent me with an apology which he hopes"—here I put on a diabolical smile, copied, I declare to you, from the one I saw at that moment on his own lips—"you will accept."

The old wretch regarded me for full two minutes in a way to unmask me had I possessed less confidence in my disguise and in my ability to support it.

"And what is this young gentleman's name?" he finally asked.

For reply, I handed him a slip of paper. He took it and read the few lines written on it, after which he began to rub his palms softly together with an unction eminently in keeping with the stray glints of light that now and then found their way through his bushy eyebrows.

"And so the young gentleman had not the courage to come again himself?" he softly suggested, with just the suspicion of an ironical laugh. "Thought, perhaps, I would exact too much commission; or make him pay too roundly for his impertinent assurance."

I shrugged my shoulders, but vouchsafed no immediate

reply, and he saw that he had to open the business himself. He did it warily and with many an incisive question which would have tripped me up if I had not been very much on my guard; but it all ended, as such matters usually do, in mutual understanding, and a promise that if the young gentleman was willing to sign a certain paper, which, by the way, was not shown me, he would in exchange give him an address which, if made proper use of, would lead to my patron finding himself an independent man within a very few days.

As this address was the one thing I was most desirous of obtaining, I professed myself satisfied with the arrangement, and proceeded to hunt up my patron, as he was called. Informing him of the result of my visit, I asked if his interest in ferreting out these criminals was strong enough to lead him to sign the vile document which the pawnbroker would probably have in readiness for him on the morrow; and being told it was, we separated for that day, with the understanding that we were to meet the next morning at the spot chosen by the pawnbroker for the completion of his nefarious bargain.

Being certain that I was being followed in all my movements by the agents of this adept in villainy, I took care, upon leaving Mr. L——, to repair to the hotel of the sporting man I was personifying. Making myself square with the proprietor I took up my quarters in the room of my sporting friend, and the better to deceive any spy who might be lurking about, I received his letters and sent out his telegrams, which, if they did not create confusion in the affairs of "The Plunger," must at least have occasioned him no little work the next day.

Promptly at ten o'clock on the following morning I met my patron at the appointed place of rendezvous; and when I tell you that this was no other than the ancient and now disused cemetery of which a portion is still to be seen off Chatham Square, you will understand the uncanny nature of this whole adventure, and the lurking sense there was in it of brooding death and horror. The scene, which in these days is disturbed by elevated railroad trains and the flapping of long lines of particolored clothes strung high up

across the quiet tombstones, was at that time one of peaceful rest, in the midst of a quarter devoted to everything for which that rest is the fitting and desirable end; and as we paused among the mossy stones, we found it hard to realize that in a few minutes there would be standing beside us the concentrated essence of all that was evil and despicable in human nature.

He arrived with a smile on his countenance that completed his ugliness, and would have frightened any honest man from his side at once. Merely glancing my way, he shuffled up to my companion, and leading him aside, drew out a paper which he laid on a flat tombstone with a gesture significant of his desire that the other should affix to it the required signature.

Meantime I stood guard, and while attempting to whistle a light air, was carelessly taking in the surroundings, and conjecturing, as best I might, the reasons which had induced the old ghoul to make use of this spot for his diabolical business, and had about decided that it was because he was a ghoul, and thus felt at home among the symbols of mortality, when I caught sight of two or three young fellows who were lounging on the other side of the fence.

These were so evidently accomplices that I wondered if the two sly boys I had engaged to stand by me through this affair had spotted them, and would know enough to follow them back to their haunts.

A few minutes later, the old rascal came sneaking toward me, with a gleam of satisfaction in his half-closed eyes.

"You are not wanted any longer," he grunted. "The young gentleman told me to say that he could look out for himself now."

"The young gentleman had better pay me the round fifty he promised me," I grumbled in return, with that sudden change from indifference to menace which I thought best calculated to further my plans; and shouldering the miserable wretch aside, I stepped up to my companion, who was still lingering in a state of hesitation among the gravestones.

"Quick! Tell me the number and street which he has given you!" I whispered, in a tone quite out of keeping with the angry and reproachful air I had assumed.

He was about to answer, when the old fellow came sidling up behind us. Instantly the young man before me rose to the occasion, and putting on an air of conciliation, said in a soothing tone:

"There, there, don't bluster. Do one thing more for me, and I will add another fifty to that I promised you. Conjure up an anonymous letter—you know how—and send it to my father, saying that if he wants to know where his son loses his hundreds, he must go to the place on the dock, opposite 5 South Street, some night shortly after nine. It would not work with most men, but it will with my father, and when he has been in and out of that place, and I succeed to the fortune he will leave me, then I will remember you, and—"

"Say, too," a sinister voice here added in my ear, "that if he wishes to effect an entrance into the gambling den which his son haunts, he must take the precaution of tying a bit of blue ribbon in his buttonhole. It is a signal meaning business, and must not be forgotten," chuckled the old fellow, evidently deceived at last into thinking I was really one of his own kind.

I answered by a wink, and taking care to attempt no further communication with my patron, I left the two, as soon as possible, and went back to the hotel, where I dropped "the sport," and assumed a character and dress which enabled me to make my way undetected to the house of my young patron, where for two days I lay low, waiting for a suitable time in which to make my final attempt to penetrate this mystery.

I knew that for the adventure I was now contemplating considerable courage was required. But I did not hesitate. The time had come for me to show my mettle. In the few communications I was enabled to hold with my superiors I told them of my progress and arranged with them my plan of work. As we all agreed that I was about to encounter no common villainy, these plans naturally partook of finesse, as you will see if you follow my narrative to the end.

Early in the evening of a cool November day I sallied forth into the streets, dressed in the habiliments and wearing the guise of the wealthy old gentleman whose secret guest I had

been for the last few days. As he was old and portly, and I young and spare, this disguise had cost me no little thought and labor. But assisted as I was by the darkness, I had but little fear of betraying myself to any chance spy who might be upon the watch, especially as Mr. L—— had a peculiar walk, which, in my short stay with him, I had learned to imitate perfectly. In the lapel of my overcoat I had tied a tag of blue ribbon, and, though for all I knew this was a signal devoting me to a secret and mysterious death, I walked along in a buoyant condition of mind, attributable, no doubt, to the excitement of the venture and to my desire to test my powers, even at the risk of my life.

It was nine o'clock when I reached South Street. It was no new region to me, nor was I ignorant of the specified drinking den on the dock to which I had been directed. I remembered it as a bright spot in a mass of ship-prows and bow-rigging, and was possessed, besides, of a vague consciousness that there was something odd in connection with it which had aroused my curiosity sufficiently in the past for me to have once formed the resolution of seeing it again under circumstances which would allow me to give it some attention. But I never thought that the circumstances would involve my own life, impossible as it is for a detective to reckon upon the future or to foresee the events into which he will be hurried by the next crime which may be reported at police headquarters.

There were but few persons in the street when I crossed to The Heart's Delight—so named from the heart-shaped opening in the framework of the door, through which shone a light, inviting enough to one chilled by the keen November air and oppressed by the desolate appearance of the almost deserted street. But amongst those persons I thought I recognized more than one familiar form, and felt reassured as to the watch which had been set upon the house.

The night was dark and the river especially so, but in the gloomy space beyond the dock I detected a shadow blacker than the rest, which I took for the police boat they had promised to have in readiness in case I needed rescue from the waterside. Otherwise the surroundings were as usual, and saving the gruff singing of some drunken sailor coming

from a narrow side street near by, no sound disturbed the somewhat lugubrious silence of this weird and forsaken spot.

Pausing an instant before entering, I glanced up at the building, which was about three stories high, and endeavored to see what there was about it which had once arrested my attention, and came to the conclusion that it was its exceptional situation on the dock, and the ghostly effect of the hoisting-beam projecting from the upper story like a gibbet. And yet this beam was common to many a warehouse in the vicinity, though in none of them were there any such signs of life as proceeded from the curious mixture of sail loft, boat shop, and drinking saloon, now before me. Could it be that the ban of criminality was upon the house, and that I had been conscious of this without being able to realize the cause of my interest?

Not stopping to solve my sensations further, I tried the door, and, finding it yield easily to my touch, turned the knob and entered. For a moment I was blinded by the smoky glare of the heated atmosphere into which I stepped, but presently I was able to distinguish the vague outlines of an oyster bar in the distance, and the motionless figures of some half-dozen men, whose movements had been arrested by my sudden entrance. For an instant this picture remained; then the drinking and card playing were resumed, and I stood, as it were, alone, on the sanded floor near the door.

Improving the opportunity for a closer inspection of the place, I was struck by its picturesqueness. It had evidently been once used as a ship chandlery, and on the walls, which were but partly plastered, there still hung old bits of marlin, rusty rings, and such other evidences of former traffic as did not interfere with the present more lucrative business.

Below were the two bars, one at the right of the door, and the other at the lower end of the room near a window, through whose small, square panes I caught a glimpse of the colored lights of a couple of ferryboats, passing each other in midstream.

At a table near me sat two men, grumbling at each other over a game of cards. They were large and powerful figures in the contracted space of this long and narrow room, and

my heart gave a bound of joy as I recognized on them certain marks by which I was to know friend from foe in this possible den of thieves and murderers.

Two sailors at the bar were bona fide habitués of the place and so were the two other waterside characters I could faintly discern in one of the dim corners. Meantime a man was approaching me.

Let me see if I can describe him. He was about thirty, and had the complexion and figure of a consumptive, but his eye shone with the yellow glare of a beast of prey, and in the cadaverous hollows of his ashen cheeks and amid the lines about his thin drawn lips there lay, for all his conciliatory smile, an expression so cold and yet so ferocious that I spotted him at once as the man to whose genius we were indebted for the new scheme of murder which I was jeopardizing my life to understand. But I allowed none of the repugnance with which he inspired me to appear in my manner, and, greeting him with half a nod, waited for him to speak. His voice had that smooth quality which betrays the hypocrite.

"Has the gentleman any appointment here?" he asked, letting his glance fall for the merest instant on the lapel of my coat.

I returned a decided affirmative. "Or rather," I went on, with a meaning look he evidently comprehended, "my son has, and I have made up my mind to know just what deviltry he is up to these days. I can make it worth your while to give me the opportunity."

"Oh, I see," he assented with a glance at the pocketbook I had just drawn out. "You want a private room from which you can watch the young scapegrace. I understand, I understand. But the private rooms are above. Gentlemen are not comfortable here."

"I should say not," I murmured, and drew from the pocketbook a bill which I slid quietly into his hand. "Now take me where I shall be safe," I suggested, "and yet in full sight of the room where the young gentlemen play. I wish to catch him at his tricks. Afterward—"

"All will be well," he finished smoothly, with another

glance at my blue ribbon. "You see I do not ask you the young gentleman's name. I take your money and leave all the rest to you. Only don't make a scandal, I pray, for my house has the name of being quiet."

"Yes," thought I, "too quiet!" and for an instant felt my spirits fail me. But it was only for an instant. I had friends about me and a pistol at half-cock in the pocket of my overcoat. Why should I fear any surprise, prepared as I was for every emergency?

"I will show you up in a moment," said he; and left me to put up a heavy board shutter over the window opening on the river. Was this a signal or a precaution? I glanced toward my two friends playing cards, took another note of their broad shoulders and brawny arms, and prepared to follow my host, who now stood bowing at the other end of the room, before a covered staircase which was manifestly the sole means of reaching the floor above.

The staircase was quite a feature in the room. It ran from back to front, and was boarded all the way up to the ceiling. On these boards hung a few useless bits of chain, wire, and knotted ends of tarred ropes, which swung to and fro as the sharp November blast struck the building, giving out a weird and strangely muffled sound. Why did this sound, so easily to be accounted for, ring in my ears like a note of warning? I understand now, but I did not then, full of expectation as I was for developments out of the ordinary.

Crossing the room, I entered upon the staircase, in the wake of my companion. Though the two men at cards did not look up as I passed them, I noticed that they were alert and ready for any signal I might choose to give them. But I was not ready to give one yet. I must see danger before I summoned help, and there was no token of danger yet.

When we were about half-way up the stairs the faint light which had illuminated us from below suddenly vanished, and we found ourselves in total darkness. The door at the foot had been closed by a careful hand, and I felt, rather than heard, the stealthy pushing of a bolt across it.

My first impulse was to forsake my guide and rush back, but I subdued the unworthy impulse and stood quite still, while my companion, exclaiming, "Damn that fellow! What does

he mean by shutting the door before we're half-way up!" struck a match and lit a gas jet in the room above, which poured a flood of light upon the staircase.

Drawing my hand from the pocket in which I had put my revolver, I hastened after him into the small landing at the top of the stairs. An open door was before me, in which he stood bowing, with the half-burnt match in his hand. "This is the place, sir," he announced, motioning me in.

I entered and he remained by the door, while I passed quickly about the room, which was bare of every article of furniture save a solitary table and chair. There was not even a window in it, with the exception of one small light situated so high up in the corner made by the jutting staircase that I wondered at its use, and was only relieved of extreme apprehension at the prison-like appearance of the place by the gleam of light which came through this dusty pane, showing that I was not entirely removed from the presence of my foes if I was from that of my friends.

"Ah, you have spied the window," remarked my host, advancing toward me with a countenance he vainly endeavored to make reassuring and friendly. "That is your post of observation, sir," he whispered, with a great show of mystery. "By mounting on the table you can peer into the room where my young friends sit securely at play."

As it was not part of my scheme to show any special mistrust, I merely smiled a little grimly, and cast a glance at the table on which stood a bottle of brandy and one glass.

"Very good brandy," he whispered; "not such stuff as we give those fellows downstairs."

I shrugged my shoulders and he slowly backed toward the door.

"The young men you bid me watch are very quiet," I suggested, with a careless wave of my hand toward the room he had mentioned.

"Oh, there is no one there yet. They begin to straggle in about ten o'clock."

"Ah," was my quiet rejoinder, "I am likely, then, to have use for your brandy."

He smiled again and made a swift motion toward the door.

"If you want anything," said he, "just step to the foot of the staircase and let me know. The whole establishment is at your service." And with one final grin that remains in my mind as the most threatening and diabolical I have ever witnessed, he laid his hand on the knob of the door and slid quickly out.

It was done with such an air of final farewell that I felt my apprehensions take a positive form. Rushing toward the door through which he had just vanished, I listened and heard, as I thought, his stealthy feet descend the stair. But when I sought to follow, I found myself for the second time overwhelmed by darkness. The gas jet, which had hitherto burned with great brightness in the small room, had been turned off from below, and beyond the faint glimmer which found its way through the small window of which I have spoken, not a ray of light now disturbed the heavy gloom of this gruesome apartment.

I had thought of every contingency but this, and for a few minutes my spirits were dashed. But I soon recovered some remnants of self-possession, and began feeling for the knob I could no longer see. Finding it after a few futile attempts, I was relieved to discover that this door at last was not locked; and, opening it with a careful hand, I listened intently, but could hear nothing save the smothered sound of men talking in the room below.

Should I signal for my companions? No, for the secret was not yet mine as to how men passed from this room into the watery grave which was the evident goal for all wearers of the blue ribbon.

Stepping back into the middle of the room, I carefully pondered my situation, but could get no further than the fact that I was somehow, and in some way, in mortal peril. Would it come in the form of a bullet, or a deadly thrust from an unseen knife? I did not think so. For, to say nothing of the darkness, there was one reassuring fact which recurred constantly to my mind in connection with the murders I was endeavoring to trace to this den of iniquity.

None of the gentlemen who had been found drowned had shown any marks of violence on their bodies, so it was not attack I was to fear, but some mysterious, underhanded

treachery which would rob me of consciousness and make the precipitation of my body into the water both safe and easy. Perhaps it was in the bottle of brandy that the peril lay; perhaps—but why speculate further! I would watch till midnight and then, if nothing happened, signal my companions to raid the house.

Meantime a peep into the next room might help me toward solving the mystery. Setting the bottle and glass aside, I dragged the table across the floor, placed it under the lighted window, mounted, and was about to peer through, when the light in that apartment was put out also. Angry and overwhelmed, I leaped down, and, stretching out my hands till they touched the wainscoting, I followed the wall around till I came to the knob of the door, which I frantically clutched. But I did not turn it immediately, I was too anxious to catch these villains at work.

Would I be conscious of the harm they meditated against me, or would I imperceptibly yield to some influence of which I was not yet conscious, and drop to the floor before I could draw my revolver or put to my mouth the whistle upon which I depended for assistance and safety? It was hard to tell, but I determined to cling to my first intention a little longer, and so stood waiting and counting the minutes, while wondering if the captain of the police boat was not getting impatient, and whether I had not more to fear from the anxiety of my friends than the cupidity of my foes.

You see, I had anticipated communicating with the men in this boat by certain signals and tokens which had been arranged between us. But the lack of windows in the room had made all such arrangements futile, so I knew as little of their actions as they did of my sufferings; all of which did not tend to add to the cheerfulness of my position.

However, I held out for a half-hour, listening, waiting, and watching in a darkness which, like that of Egypt, could be felt, and when the suspense grew intolerable I struck a match and let its blue flame flicker for a moment over the face of my watch. But the matches soon gave out and with them my patience, if not my courage, and I determined to end the suspense by knocking at the door beneath.

This resolution taken, I pulled open the door before me

and stepped out. Though I could see nothing, I remembered the narrow landing at the top of the stairs, and, stretching out my arms, I felt for the boarding on either hand, guiding myself by it, and began to descend, when something rising, as it were, out of the cavernous darkness before me made me halt and draw back in mingled dread and horror.

But the impression, strong as it was, was only momentary, and, resolved to be done with the matter, I precipitated myself downward, when suddenly, at about the middle of the staircase, my feet slipped and I slid forward, plunging and reaching out with hands whose frenzied grasp found nothing to cling to, down a steep inclined plane—or what to my bewildered senses appeared such—till I struck a yielding surface and passed with one sickening plunge into the icy waters of the river, which in another moment had closed dark and benumbing above my head.

It was all so rapid I did not think of uttering a cry. But happily for me the splash I made told the story, and I was rescued before I could sink a second time.

It was full half an hour before I had sufficiently recovered from the shock to relate my story. But when once I had made it known, you can imagine the gusto with which the police prepared to enter the house and confound the obliging host with a sight of my dripping garments and accusing face. And, indeed, in all my professional experience I have never beheld a more sudden merging of the bully into a coward than was to be seen in this slick villain's face, when I was suddenly pulled from the crowd and placed before him, with the old man's wig gone from my head, and the tag of blue ribbon still clinging to my wet coat.

His game was up, and he saw it; and Ebenezer Gryce's career had begun.

Like all destructive things the device by which I had been run into the river was simple enough when understood. In the first place it had been constructed to serve the purpose of a stairway and chute. The latter was in plain sight when it was used by the sailmakers to run the finished sails into the waiting yawls below. At the time of my adventure, and for some time before, the possibilities of the place had been discovered by mine host, who had ingeniously put a partition

up the entire stairway, dividing the steps from the smooth runway. At the upper part of the runway he had built a few steps, wherewith to lure the unwary far enough down to insure a fatal descent. To make sure of his game he had likewise ceiled the upper room all around, including the inclosure of the stairs.

The door to the chute and the door to the stairs were side by side, and being made of the same boards as the wainscoting, were scarcely visible when closed, while the single knob that was used, being transferable from one to the other, naturally gave the impression that there was but one door. When this adroit villain called my attention to the little window around the corner, he no doubt removed the knob from the stairs door and quickly placed it in the one opening upon the chute. Another door, connecting the two similar landings without, explains how he got from the chute staircase into which he passed on leaving me, to the one communicating with the room below.

The mystery was solved, and my footing on the force secured; but to this day—and I am an old man now—I have not forgotten the horror of the moment when my feet slipped from under me, and I felt myself sliding downward, without hope of rescue, into a pit of heaving waters, where so many men of conspicuous virtue had already ended their valuable lives.

Myriad thoughts flashed through my brain in that brief interval, and among them the whole method of operating this death-trap, together with every detail of evidence that would secure the conviction of the entire gang.

The Path of Murtogh

BY HAROLD FREDERIC

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A CURSE is laid on one long narrow strip of the sea, down in front of Dunlogher.

No matter how lifeless the sunlit air may hang above; no matter how silken-smooth the face of the waters nearest by, lifting themselves without a ripple in the most indolent summer swell—an angry churning goes always forward here. Disordered currents will never tire of their coiling and writhing somewhere underneath: the surface is streaked with sinister markings like black shadows, which yet are no shadows at all; and these glide without ceasing out and in among the twisted lines of gray-white scum, and everything moves and nothing changes, till Judgment Day. It has the name of the *Slighe Mhuircheartaigh* (spoken Shlee Vurharthee), or the Path of Murtogh.

Though 'tis well known that the grandest ling and turbot and wonderful other big fishes lie swaying themselves in the depths of this wicked water, with giant crayfish and crabs to bear them company, the fishermen of Dunmanus and Goleen and Crookhaven, and even the strangers from Cape Clear, would not buy a soul from Purgatory at the price of drawing a net through it. They have a great wish to please the buyers in the English ships, and the Scotch and Manx, Oh, yes—but a creel of gold would not tempt them to meddle in "Murty's Path." They steer their boats far to one side, and bless themselves as they pass, in the manner of their fathers and grandfathers before them.

These poor men, having not much of the Irish now, and not rightly understanding what their elders may have heard the truth of, say that this snake-like forbidding stretch wears its name from Murty *Oge* O'Sullivan. Their thought is that the uncanny boiling began in the wake of the English

Speedwell, as the corpse of the vanquished privateer spun and twirled at her keel through the foam, on its savage last journey from Castletown to Cork. But it is enough to look down at this evil place, to see that the malediction upon it must be older than Murty *Oge's* time, which, in the sight of Dunlogher, was as yesterday. Why, men are living this year who talked with men who saw his head spiked over South gate. There were no great curses left unused in Ireland at so late a day as his. And again, would it be the waters of Dunlogher that would tear themselves for an O'Sullivan?

No, the curse threads back a dozen lives behind poor Murty *Oge.* The strange currents weave and twine, and the greasy foam spreads and gathers, gathers and spreads, in the path of another, whose birthright it was that they should baptize him. The true tale is of Murty the Proud, or if you will have his style from the Book of Schull—Murtogh *Mordha* O'Mahony, chief in Dunlogher. And his time is not so distant, in one way, as men take account of years. But in another it is too remote for any clear vision, because the "little people" of the old, fearful kind had left every other part of Ireland, and they were just halting together for a farewell pause in Dunlogher, by reason of its being the last end of the land, and their enchantments fanned up a vapor about Murty *Mordha* to his undoing. And it is as if that mist still rose between us and his story.

I

When the sun began to sink out of sight, down behind the sea, two men stood on the edge of the great cliff of Dunlogher, their faces turned to the west.

The yellow flame from the sky shone full in the eyes of Murtogh, and he held his huge, bare head erect with boldness, and stared back at it without blinking. His companion, a little, shriveled old man, whom he held by the arm, had the glowing light on his countenance as well, but his eyelids were shut. He bent himself against his chief's thick shoulder and trembled.

"Are we to the brink itself?" he asked; his aged voice shook when he spoke.

"Here, where I stand, when I would grip you, and hold you forth at the length of my arm, and open my hand, you would fall a hundred fathoms in the air." Murtogh's free arm and hand made the terrible gesture to fit his words, but he tightened his protecting clasp upon the other, and led him back a few paces. The old man groaned his sigh of relief.

"It is you who are the brave nobleman, Murty," he whispered, admiringly. "There is none to equal your strength, or your grand courage, in all the land. And the heart of pure gold along with it!"

Murtogh tossed his big head, to shake the twisted forelock of his hair to one side. "I looked straight into the sun at noon on St. John's Day," he said, quietly, with the pride of a child. "If it were a hundred times as bright, I would look at it, and never fear for my eyes. I would hold my own son out here, stretched over the abyss, and he would be no safer in his bed. Whatever I wished to do, I would do it."

"You would—Oh, you would!" assented the old man, in tones of entire sincerity.

The chieftain kept his eyes on the skyline, beneath which, as the radiance above deepened, the waters grew ashen and coldly dark. Musing, he held his silence for a time. Then, with abruptness, he asked:

"What age were you, Owny Hea, when the McSwineys put out your eyes? Were you strong enough to remember the sun well?"

"I was of no strength at all," the other whimpered, the tragedy of his childhood affecting his speech on the instant. "I was in my mother's arms. There were the men breaking in through the wall, and the kine bellowing outside, and my father cut down; and then it was like my mother drew her cloak tight over my head—and no one came ever to take it off again. I forget the sun."

Murtogh nodded his head. "I will go to Muskerry some day," he said, in a kindly way. "I cannot tell when, just now; but I will go, and I will burn and desolate everything for six miles around, and you shall have a bag for your harp made of eyelids of the McSwineys."

Old Owny lifted his sightless face toward his master, and smiled with wistful affection. "Ah, Murty, dear," he expostulated, mildly, "it is you who have the grand nature; but think, Murty—I am a very old man, and no kin of yours. It is fifty years since the last man who took my eyes drew breath. If you went now, no living soul could tell what you came for, or why the great suffering was put upon them. And, moreover, the O'Mahonys Carbery have wives from the McSwineys these three generations. No feud lies now."

The lord of Dunlogher growled sharply between his teeth, and Owny shrank further back.

"How long will you be learning," Murtogh demanded, with an arrogant note in his voice, "that I have no concern in the O'Mahonys Carbery, or the O'Mahonys *Fonn-Iartarach,* or any other? I do not take heed of Conogher of Ardintenant, or Teige of Rosbrin, or Donogh of Dunmanus, or Donal of Leamcon. I will give them all my bidding to do, and they will do it, or I will kill them, and spoil their castles. You could not behold it, but you have your song from the words of others: how last year I fell upon Diarmaid *Bhade,* and crushed him and his house, and slew his son, and brought away his herds. His father's father and mine were brothers. He is nearer to me in blood than the rest, yet I would not spare him. I made his Ballydevlin a nest for owls and bats. Let the others observe what I did. I am in Dunlogher, and I am the O'Mahony here, and I look the sun in the face like an eagle. Put that to your song!"

The sound came to them, from the walled bawn and gateways beyond the Three Castles, a hundred yards behind, of voices in commotion. The old bard lifted his head, and his brow scored itself in lines of listening attention. If Murtogh heard, he gave no sign, but gazed again in meditation out upon the vast waste of waters, blackening now as the purple reflections of the twilight waned.

"Blind men have senses that others lack," he remarked at last. "Tell me, you, does the earth we stand on seem ever to you to be turning round?"

Owny shuddered a little at the thought which came to him. "When you led me out beyond here, and I felt the big

round sea-pinks under my feet, and remembered they grew only on the very edge—" he began.

"Not that," the chief broke in, "'tis not my meaning. But at Rosbrin there was a book written by Fineen the son of Diarmaid, an uncle to my father's father, and my father heard it read from this book that the world turned round one way, like a duck on a spit, and the sun turned round the other way, and that was why they were apart all night. And often I come here, and I swear there is a movement under my feet. But elsewhere there is none, not in the bawn, or in the towers, or anywhere else but just here."

The old man inclined his face, as if he could see the ground he stood upon, but shook his head after a moment's waiting. "It would not be true, Murty," he suggested. "Old Fineen had a mighty scholarship, as I have heard, and he made an end to edify the angels, but—but—"

Murtogh did not wait for the hesitating conclusion. "I saw his tomb when I was a lad, in the chapel at Rosbrin. He was laid at his own desire under a weight of stone like my wall here. I saw even then how foolish it was. These landsmen have no proper sense. How will they rise at the blessed Resurrection, with all that burden of stone to hold them down? I have a better understanding than that. I buried my father, as he buried his father, out yonder in the sea. And I will be buried there, too, and my son after me—and if I have other children—" he stole a swift glance at the old man's withered face as he spoke—"if I have others, I say, it will be my command that they shall follow me there, when their time comes. I make you witness to that wish, Owny Hea."

The bard hung his head. "As if my time would not come first!" he said, for the mere sake of saying something. Then, gathering courage, he pulled upon the strong arm which was still locked in his, and raised his head to speak softly in the O'Mahony's ear.

"If only the desire of your heart were given you, Murty," he murmured; "if only once I could hold a babe of yours to my breast, and put its pretty little hands in my beard—I'd be fit to pray for the men who took my eyes from me. And Murty dear"—his voice rose in tremulous entreaty as he

went on—"tell me, Murty—I'm of an age to be your father's father, and I've no eyesight to shame you—is she—is your holy wife coming to see her duty differently? Have you hope that—that—?"

Murtogh turned abruptly on his heel, swinging his companion round with him. They walked a dozen paces toward the sea-gate of the castles, before he spoke. "You have never seen her, Owny!" he said, gravely. "You do not know at all how beautiful she is. It is not in the power of your mind to imagine it. There is no one like her in all the world. She is not just flesh and blood like you, Owny, or even like me. I am a great lord among men, Owny, and I am not afraid of any man. I would put the MacCarthy, or even the Earl of Desmond, over my cliff like a rat, if he came to me here, and would not do me honor. But whenever I come where she sits, I am like a little dirty boy, frightened before a great shrine of our Blessed Lady, all with jewels and lights and incense. I take shame to myself when she looks at me, that there are such things in my heart for her to see."

Owny sighed deeply. "The grandest princess in the world might be proud to be mated to you, Murty," he urged.

"True enough," responded Murtogh, with candor. "But she is not a princess—or any mere woman at all. She is a saint. Perhaps she is more still. Listen, Owny. Do you remember how I took her—how I swam for her through the breakers—and snapped the bone of my arm to keep the mast of their wreck from crushing her when the wave flung it upon us, and still made land with her head on my neck, and hung to the bare rock against all the devils of the sea sucking to pull me down—?"

"Is it not all in my song?" said Owny, with gentle reproach.

"Owny, man, listen!" said Murtogh, halting and giving new impressiveness to his tone. "I took her from the water. Her companions were gone; their vessel was gone. Did we ever see sign of them afterward? And her family—the Sigersons of that island beyond Tiobrad—when men of mine sailed thither, and asked for Hugh, son of Art, were they not told that the O'Flaherty had passed over the island, and

left nothing alive on it the size of a mussel shell? Draw nearer to me, Owny. You will be thinking the more without your eyes. Have you thought that it may be she—whisper now!—that she may belong to the water?"

They stood motionless in the gathering twilight, and the bard turned the problem over deliberately. At last he seemed to shake his head. *"They* would not be displaying such piety, as the old stories of them go," he suggested, "or—I mean it well to you, Murty—or breaking husbands' hearts with vows of celibacy."

The O'Mahony pushed the old man from him. "Then if she be a saint," he cried, "why then it were better for me to make ten thousand more blind men like you, and tear my own eyes out, and lead you all headlong over the cliff there, than risk the littlest offense to her pure soul!"

The old bard held out a warning hand. "People are coming!" he said. Then gliding towards his chief, he seized the protecting arm again, and patted it, and fawned against it. "Where you go, Murty," he said eagerly, "I follow. What you say, I say."

Some dancing lights had suddenly revealed themselves at the corner of the nearest castle wall. Murtogh had not realized before that it was dusk. "They will be looking for me," he said, and moved forward, guiding his companion's steps. The thought that with Owny it was always dark rose in him, and drove other things away.

Three men with torches came up—rough men with bare legs and a single skirt-like tunic of yellow woollen cloth, and uncovered heads with tangled and matted shocks of black hair. The lights they bore gleamed again in the fierce eyes which looked out from under their forelocks.

"O'Mahony," one of them said, "the *liathan* priest is at the gate—young Donogh, son of Donogh *Bhade* who fled to Spain. He is called Father Donatus now."

"What will he want here?" growled Murtogh. "I have beaten his father; if I have the mind, his tonsure will not hold me from beating him also."

"He has brought a foreign Spaniard, a young man with breeches and a sword, who comes to you from the King of Spain."

Murtogh straightened himself, and disengaged the arm of the blind man. "Run forward, you two," he ordered sharply, "and call all the men from the bawns and the cattle and the boats, and I will have them light torches, and stand in a line from the second tower to the postern, and show their spears well in front, and be silent. I will not have any man talk but myself, or thrust himself into notice. We were Kings of Rathlin, and we have our own matters to discuss with the Kings of Spain."

II

Three score fighting men, some bearing lights, and all showing shields, and spears, or javelins, or long hooked axes, crowded in the semblance of a line along the narrow way to the large keep—and behind them packed four times their number of women and children—watched Murtogh when he brought his guests past from the gate.

He moved proudly up the boreen, with a slow step, and the gleam of a high nature in his eyes. His own people saw afresh how great was his right to be proud. The broad hard muscles of his legs, straining to burst their twisted leather thongs as he walked; the vast weight and thickness of the breast and shoulders, under the thin summer cloak of cloth from the Low Countries which he held wrapped tight about them; the corded sinews of his big bare neck; above all, the lion-like head, with its dauntless regard and its splendid brown-black mane, and the sparkle of gold in the bushing glibb on his brow—where else in all Ireland would their match be found? But for that strange injunction to silence, the fighters of the sept would be splitting the air with yells for their chieftain. They struck their weapons together, and made the gaze they bent upon him burn with meaning, and he, without looking, read it, and bore himself more nobly yet; and the mothers and wives and little ones, huddled behind in the darkness, groaned aloud with the pain of their joy in Murty *mordha*.

It swelled the greatness of Murtogh when they looked upon those who followed him. "It is the *soggarth liathan*," they whispered, at view of the young priest, with his pointed face

and untimely whitened hair. He would not turn his ferret glance to right or left, as he followed close in his cousin's lordly footsteps, for the reason that these sea-wolves of Dunlogher had ravaged and burnt his father's country within the year, and slain his brother, and gnashed their teeth now, even as he passed, for rage at the sight of him.

And the messenger who came to speak to Murty the words of the King of Spain! They grinned as they stared upon him. An eel-fly, a lame fledgeling gull, a young crab that has lost its shell—thus they murmured of him. His legs were scarce the bigness of a Cape woman's arms, and were clad in red silken cloth stretched as close as skin. He had foolish little feet, with boots of yellow leather rising to the knee, and from the mid-thigh to the waist were unseemly bulging breeches, blown out like a buoy, and gashed downwise with stripes of glowing colors, repeated again in his flowing sleeves. His burnished steel corslet and long reed-like sword would be toys for children in Dunlogher. His face, under its wide plumed hat of drab felt, was that of no soldier at all—a thin, smooth, rounded face of a strange smoky darkness of hue, with tiny upturned moustachios, and delicately bended nose. And the eyes of him! They seemed to be the half of his countenance in size, what with their great dusky-white balls, and sloe-black centers, and their thick raven fringes and brows that joined each other. The armed kernes who stood nearest took not much heed of these eyes, but the older women, peeping between their shoulders, saw little else, and they made the sign of the cross at the sight.

When two hours had passed, the baser folk of Dunlogher knew roughly what was in the wind. Two wayfaring men of humble station had come in the train of the Spaniard, and though they had no Irish, their story somehow made itself told. A ship from Spain, which indeed Dunlogher had seen pass a week before, had put in at Dingle, on the Kerry coast, and had landed James Fitzmaurice, the Papal legate Sanders, some other clergy, and a score and more Spanish gentlemen or men at arms, with a banner blessed by the Holy Father. A great army from Spain and Italy would follow in their wake. But, meantime, the first comers were building a fort

at Smerwick, and the clan of Fitzgerald was up, and messengers were flying through the length and breadth of Munster and Connaught, passing the word to the Catholic chiefs that the hour of driving the English into the sea was at hand.

The lower floors of the castle and the pleasant grassy bawns outside, cool with the soft sea wind of the summer night, were stirred to a common fervor by these tidings. The other O'Mahonys, the chiefs of Dunmanus and Dunbeacon to the north, of Ballydevlin, Leamcon, Ardintenant, and Rosbrin to the south, and elsewhere in Desmond the O'Sullivans, MacCarthys, O'Driscolls and the rest, were clashing their shields. Ah, when they should see Murty striding into the field!

In the big hall overhead, where—after three courses of stone stairs were climbed, so narrow that a man in armor must needs walk sideways—the abode of the chieftain and his own blood began, Murtogh was ready to hear the message of the King of Spain.

The broad rough-hewn table, with its dishes of half-cleaned bones and broken cheeses and bread, its drinking horns and flagons, and litter of knives and spoons, had been given over to the master's greyhounds, who stood with forepaws on the board and insinuated their long necks and muzzles noiselessly here and there among the remains of the meal. A clump of reeds, immersed in a brazier of fish oil, burned smokily among the dishes for light.

When, at the finish of the eating, Murtogh had given the signal for departure to the dozen strong men nearest akin to him, or in his best favor, there were left only his son, a slow, good lad born of a first wife long since dead, the blind Owny, the Spaniard and the *liathan* (or prematurely gray) young priest.

Then Murtogh said to this last man: "Donogh, son of Donogh *Bhade,* I have not frowned on you nor struck you, for the reason that you are my guest. But because my hand is open to you, it is no reason that I should lie, and pretend that I am your friend or you mine. Your brother, Diarmaid, the one I could not get to kill, calls himself my heir, and twice has sought to take the life of my son here, my Donogh

baoth. Therefore, I will have you go now, and sit below with the others, or read your prayers in your chamber where you are to sleep, because I will hear now what the King of Spain says to me, and that is not meant for your ears."

The priest stood on his feet. "Your pride does not become you, Murty *Mordha,*" he said, "when I am come to you for your soul's sake and the glory of religion." His voice was thin and high-pitched, but there was no fear in it.

"I will not be taking trouble for my soul just now," replied Murty; "that will be for another time, when I am like to die. And then I will have my own confessor, and not you, nor anyone like you. So you will go now, as I bid you."

Father Donatus, standing still, curled his lips in a hard smile. "You are a great man, Murty! You could dishonor my father, and slay my brother like the headstrong bullock that you are; but there are things you cannot do. You cannot lay your finger to me because I come on the business of God."

"It is the business of the King of Spain that I will be thinking of," said Murty, with curtness.

"They are the same," rejoined the young priest. "And you are wrong to say what you will be thinking of, because you have not a mind to think at all. If you could think, you would know that you cannot have the words of the King of Spain except when I interpret them to you. This noble gentleman who comes with me speaks more tongues than one, but he had no Irish, and you—it is well known that you have nothing else. Don Tello has sat at your side for two hours, and you have not observed that each word between him and you came and went through me. Oh, yes; you are a great man, Murty, but your mind is not of a high order."

The chieftain rose also. The blood came into his face, and he laid a strong hand on the hilt of his broad sword. But the foot that he lifted he set down again; and he looked at his kinsman, the *liathan* priest, and did not move toward him. "You are in the right to wear a gown," he said slowly, "because you have the tongue and the evil temper of an ugly girl. You speak foolish things in your heat, and they disgrace you. I have the best mind that any man in my family ever had. I have more thoughts in my mind than there are

words in your Latin book. I would speak whatever I chose to this gentleman, and I would understand his speech when I troubled myself to do so. But I will not do that—for some time at least; I will have my wife come, and she will sit here, and she will tell me his words, and I will be taking my ease."

Murtogh *Mordha* called his son to his side, and gave him a message to deliver.

The priest, smiling in his cold way, leant over and spoke for the space of a minute in a tongue strange to Dunlogher into the Spaniard's ear. Then he stood erect, and gazed at Murtogh with an ill-omened look, and so turned and strode after the lad out of the door.

III

A young woman of the rarest beauty, tall and slender, and with the carriage of a great lady, came into the chamber and moved across to the high, carved chair which Murtogh made ready for her, and seated herself upon it as upon a throne. She had a pale, fair skin, and her hair, coiled heavily in plaits upon her shoulders, was of the hue of a red harvest sun. There were jewels in this hair and upon her throat and hands, and her long robes were of rich, shining stuffs. A chain of wooden beads, with a cross of gold at the end, hung from her girdle, and she gathered this in her fingers as she sat.

The boy, Donogh *baoth,* came with her, and crouched in humility on the floor at her side. His thick form and dark hair, and his over-large head, spoke a likeness now to his father which was not to be noted before. When, as if under the spell of her attraction, he nestled nearer the lady's chair, and touched her garment with his hand, she drew it away.

Murtogh *Mordha,* before he took his seat again, and leant back to half lie upon the skins thrown over it, told her the Spaniard's name, and explained to her his errand. The Spaniard, bowing himself low, sank upon one knee, and reverently kissed her hand, as Murty had seen his father kiss the ring of the Bishop of Ross. He was proud to ob-

serve this, because his wife was holier and more saintly still than any bishop.

The lady smiled upon the Spaniard, and all that she said to him, and he to her, was in his tongue. "I cannot speak it well," she said. Her voice had the sweetness of a perfume in the air. "I lived at Seville, in the old convent there, for only two years. I have no joy of remembrance now, save in the peace and charm of those years there; but I fear my memory of the dear speech is dimmed. But I will listen with all my ears—and oh, so gladly!"

She fastened her regard upon his eyes—the great, rolling, midnight eyes—and held it there, that she might the better follow his speech.

"Beautiful lady," the Spaniard said, "I learn only now the power our language, spoken by such lips, may have to enthrall the hearing. Condone my error, I pray you, but I caught from Father Donatus that you were this strong chieftain's wife, and I see that you are his daughter; and even that is strange, to look upon him and *you*."

"I am his wife, but only in name, naught else," she answered. The wave of comprehension sweeping over the surface of the Spaniard's eyes made instant confidence between them. "I am in captivity here. He is a pirate, a Goth, a murderous barbarian. He and his savages here—but of this more a little hence. I beg you now to speak something of your mission—your errand here. He is as helpless to follow our words as one of those hounds; but no dog is keener to suspicion."

The Spaniard with eager swiftness of speech, piled one upon another the curtailed topics of his business. The lady, moving her fingers along the beads, gleaned the narrow pith of it, and dressed it forth in new phrases for the lord of Dunlogher.

"*The King of Spain will send this month,*" she said in the Irish, "*a mighty army to drive the heretic English to the last man from this Island of Saints. They have wounded God too long! The last drop of Heaven's patience is dried up by their crimes. Their Queen was not born in lawful wedlock, and the Blessed Sacraments are daily profaned by her and her accursed people. Those who sustain and honor God now*

will be sustained and honored by Him through glorious Eternity."

"These things are well known to me," said Murtogh. "I would not need the King of Spain to tell them to me. How will he speak concerning myself?"

The lady was not afraid to smile into the eyes of the Spaniard. "You are to speak after a moment or two," she told him, with a calm voice; "but hear me this little first. My heart is broken here. I do not know how I have had the courage to live. These jewels I wear, the fabrics of my raiment, the wines on the board yonder, are all the booty of blood-stained waves down at the foot of this terrible cliff. He and his savages burn false lights, and lure ships to the rocks, and rob and murder their people. It was thus unhappily I came here, and in fear of my life, while I was still half dead from the water, I suffered the marriage words to be read over me—but now you must speak."

"I would show you tears rather than words, dear lady," the Spaniard said; "and blows on your behalf more preferably than either. Father Donatus whispered the tithe of this to me. The whole truth burns like fire in my heart. As my fathers gave their life blood to drive the infidel from Grenada—so lay my own poor life at your dear feet. If aught but harm to you could come from it, I would slay him now where he lolls there on the skins. He is looking at you now, waiting for you to speak."

"The King of Spain has heard much of you," she began in the Irish, without turning her head. *"He is filled with admiration for your strength and valor. He desires deeply to know what you will be doing. When you will take arms, and join him with your great might in the battles, then there cannot be any doubt of his victory."*

"That it is easy to see," replied Murtogh. "But the King of Spain's battles are not my battles. There would be some reason to be given, to call me out for his wars. The English will be doing me no hurt. They cannot come here to me, by water or by land; and it they did I would not let any of them depart alive. For what cause should I go to them? Let the King of Spain tell me what it would be in his mind to do in my behalf, when I did this thing for him."

The lady spoke to the Spaniard. "The last of my people are killed. They would not have seemed different to you perhaps—to you who were bred in the gentle graces of Spain—but they were not the ferocious barbarians these O'Mahonys are. My father was learned in Latin and English, and it was his dream that I should wed in Spain."

"Oh, rapturous vision!" said Don Tello, with new flames kindling in his eyes. "And if it shall be proved prophetic as well, beautiful lady! Something of this, too, the priest whispered; but the precious words return to me as your dear lips breathed them forth—'wife only in name.' I long to hear them once again."

The lady repeated them, with tender deliberation, and a languorous gleam in her blue eyes began to answer his burning gaze. "I have held the fierce beast at arm's length," she said, "because he is also a fool. I would give a year of my life to be able to laugh in his face, and slap these beads across it. I have told him—the blessed thought came to me even while we knelt at the altar together—that I am bound by a vow. His big empty head is open to all the fancies that fly. He believes that an enchanted woman drives up her horses from the bottom of the lake, down at the foot of the small tower here, every night for food; and he spreads corn for them which the thieves about him fatten on. He believes in witches rising from the sea, and leprechauns, and changelings, like any ignorant herdsman out in the bog, but he is a frightened Churchman, too. He believes that I am a saint!"

"As I swear by the grave of my mother, you are!" panted Don Tello. "But speak now to him."

"The King of Spain will do very great things in your behalf," she recited, in Murtogh's tongue. *"He will make you of the rank of a commander in his armies, and he will ennoble you."*

"I am noble now," Murtogh made comment, "as noble as the King of Spain himself. I am not a MacCarthy or an O'Driscoll, that I would be craving titles to my name."

"Then he will send large rich ships here," she began again, with weariness in her tone, *"to bring you costly presents.*

And the Pope, he will grant you ten years' indulgence,—or it may be twenty."

"Ask him," broke in Murtogh, sitting up with a brightened face, his hand outstretched to secure silence for the thought that stirred within him—"ask if the Holy Father would be granting just the one spiritual favor I would beg. Will this gentleman bind the King of Spain to that?"

"And may I wholly trust," she asked the Spaniard, with half-closed eyes, through which shone the invitation of her mood, "may I trust in your knightly proffer of help? Do not answer till I have finished. You are the first who has come to me—here in this awful dungeon—and I have opened my heart to you as perhaps I should not. But you have the blood of youth in your veins, like me; you are gallant and of high lineage; you are from the land where chivalry is the law of gentle life—is it true that you will be my champion?"

The Spaniard rose with solemn dignity, though his great eyes flashed devouringly upon her, and his breast heaved under its cuirass. He half lifted his sword from the sheath, and kissed the cross of its hilt. "Oh, my beloved, I swear!" he said, in somber earnestness.

She translated the action and utterance to Murtogh. *"Whatever of a spiritual nature you would crave of his Holiness he would grant."*

"But it would be a cruel time of waiting, to send all the long way to Rome and back," he objected, "and this matter lies like lead upon my soul."

She looked up into the Spaniard's eyes, and let her own lashes tremble, and fed the ravening conflagration of his gaze with a little sigh. "It would be very sweet to believe," she murmured, "too sweet for sense, I fear me. Nay, Don Tello, I need not such a world of persuasion—only—only—lift your right hand, with thumb and two fingers out, and swear again. And say, 'Bera, I swear!'"

"It is your name?" he asked, and as she closed her eyes in assent, and slowly opened them to behold his oath, he lifted the fingers and waved them toward her, and passionately whispered, "Bera, queen of my Heaven, star of my soul, I swear!"

"That is the sign of the Pope himself," she explained, with

indifference, to Murtogh. *"Whatever wish you offered up you have it already granted. It is Don Tello who bears the holy authority from the Pope."*

The lord of Dunlogher hurled himself to his feet with a boisterous energy before which the lady, wondering, drew herself away. He stretched his bared arms toward her, then flung them upward as in invocation to the skies. The beatitude of some vast triumph illumined his glance.

"Oh, then, indeed, I am Murty *Mordha!*" he cried. "It is I who am prouder than all the Kings on earth! It is I who have won my love! Oh, glory to the Heavens that send me this joy! Glory and the praise of the saints! Glory! Glory!"

The rhapsody was without meaning to the Spaniard. He stared in astonishment at the big chieftain with the shining countenance who shouted with such vehemence up at the oaken roof. Turning a glance of inquiry at the lady, he saw that she had grown white-faced, and was cowering backward in her chair.

"Our Lady, save us!" she gasped at him in Spanish. "He has asked the Pope to absolve me from my vow."

Don Tello, no wiser, put his hand to his sword. "Tell me quickly, what it is? What am I to do?" he demanded of her.

Murtogh, with a smile from the heart moistening his eyes and transfiguring all his face, strode to the Spaniard, and grasped his reluctant hand between his own broad palms, and gripped it with the fervor of a giant.

"I would have you tell him," he called out to the Lady Bera. "Tell him that he has no other friend in any land who will do for him what Murty *Mordha* will be doing. I will ride with him into the battle, and take all his blows on my own back. I will call him my son and my brother. Whatever he will wish, I will give it to him. And all his enemies I will slay and put down for him to walk upon. Oh, Bera, the jewel restored to me, the beautiful gem I saved from the waters, tell him these things for me! Why will your lips be so silent? Would they be waiting for my kisses to waken them? And Donogh, son of mine, come hither and take my other son's hand. I will hear you swear to keep my loyalty to him the same as myself. And, Owny Hea—hither, man! You cannot see my benefactor, the man I will be giving my

life for, but you have heard his voice. You will not forget it."

The absence of all other sound of a sudden caught Murtogh's ear, and checked his flow of joyous words. He looked with bewilderment at the figure of his wife in the chair, motionless with clenched hands on her knees, and eyes fixed in a dazed stare upon vacancy. He turned again, and noted that Owny Hea had come up to the Spaniard, and was standing before him so close that their faces were near touching.

The old blind man had the smile of an infant on his withered face. He lifted his left hand to the Spaniard's breast and passed it curiously over the corselet and its throat-plate and arm-holes, muttering in Irish to himself, "I will not forget. I will not at all forget."

A zigzag flash of light darted briefly somewhere across Murtogh's vision Looking with more intentness he saw that both the blind man's hands were at the arm-pit of the Spaniard and pulled upon something not visible. Don Tello's big eyes seemed bursting from their black-fringed sockets. His face was distorted, and he curled the fingers of his hand like stiffened talons, and clawed once into the air with them. Then Owny Hea pushed him, and he pitched sprawling against Murtogh's legs, and rolled inert to the floor. His hot blood washed over Murtogh's sandaled feet.

A woman's shriek of horror burst into the air, and the hounds moaned and glided forward. Murtogh did not know why he stood so still. He could not rightly think upon what was happening, or put his mind to it. The bones in his arms were chilled, and would not move for him. He gazed with round eyes at Owny, and at the red dripping knife which the bard stretched out to him. He felt the rough tongue of a dog on his ankle. The dark corners of the chamber seemed to be moving from him a long distance away. There was a spell upon him, and he could not tremble.

The voice of Owny Hea came to him, and though it was soundless, like the speech of Dreamland, he heard all its words; "Murtogh son of Teige, I have slain your guest for the reason that I have the Spanish, and I knew the meaning of his words to this woman, and he could not live any longer. The *liathan* priest, when he would be going, told this stranger

that she you called your wife was your enemy, and made a mockery of you, and would give ear gladly to any means of dishonoring you. And the *liathan* priest spoke truly. While the woman repeated lies to you of the King of Spain and the Pope, she whispered foul scandal of you, and wicked love-words to that dog's-meat at your feet. It is I, Owen son of Aodh, who tell you these things. And now you know what you have to do!"

Murtogh turned slowly to the lady. She lay, without motion, in her chair, her head limp upon her shoulder, and the whiteness of sea foam on her cheek. Thoughts came again into his brain.

"I have the wisest mind of all in my family," he said; "I know what it is I will be doing."

He drew the short sword from his girdle, and put his nail along its edge.

"Donogh *baoth,*" he said to his son, "go below and seek out Conogher *tuathal* and Shane *buidhe,* and bid them seize the *liathan* priest between them, and bring him to me here where I am. And you will take some sleep for yourself then, for it is a late hour."

The lad looked at the pale lady with the closed eyes, and at the sword in his father's hand. He set his teeth together, and lifted his head.

"I am of years enough to see it all," he said. "I have no sleep on my eyes."

Murtogh bent over the corpse at his feet, and caressed the boy's head with his hand. "I will not call you *baoth* (simple) any more," he said, fondly. "You are my true son, and here is my ring for your finger, and you may return with them when they fetch me my *liathan* cousin."

IV

Next morning young Donogh gave his word to the men of Dunlogher, and they obeyed him, for in the one night he had thrown aside his sluggish boyhood, and they saw his father's ring on his finger, and heard a good authority in his voice. They came out from the Western gate at his command, three-

score and more, and stood from the brink of the cliff inward, with their weapons in their hands, and made a path between them. But the women and children Donogh bade remain within the bawn, and he shut the inner gate upon them. It was as if the smell of blood came to them there, for the old women put up a lamentation of death, and the others cried aloud, till the noise spread to the men on the cliff. These looked one to another and held their silence.

They did not clash their spears together when, after a long waiting, Murtogh came from the gate, and walked toward them. A fine rain was in the air, and the skies and sea were gray, and the troubled man would have no spirit for such greeting.

He bore upon his broad back a great shapeless bundle thrice his own bulk. The weight of it bent his body, and swayed his footsteps as he came. The cover of it was of skins of wild beasts, sewn rudely with thongs, and through the gaps in this cover some of the men saw stained foreign cloths and the plume of a hat, and some a shoe with a priest's buckle, and some the marble hand of a fair woman. But no word was spoken, and Murtogh, coming to the edge, heaved his huge shoulders upward, and the bundle leaped out of sight.

Then Murtogh turned and looked all his fighting-men in their faces, and smiled in gentleness upon them, and they saw that in that same night, while the "little people" had changed Donogh into a man, they had made Murtogh a child again.

"She came up from the water," he said to them, in a voice no man knew. "It was I who brought her out of the water, and fought for her with the demons under the rocks, and beat all of them off. But one of them I did not make the sign of the Cross before, and that one is the King of Spain; and so he has wrought me this mischief, and made all my labor as nothing; and she is in the water again, and I must be going to fetch her out rightly this time."

Murtogh sprang like a deer into the air, with a mighty bound which bore him far over the edge of the cliff. Some there were, in the throng that sprang forward, agile enough to be looking down the abyss before his descent was finished.

These, to their amazement, beheld a miracle. For the great fall did not kill Murtogh *Mordha,* but the waters boiled and rose to meet him, and held him up on their tossing currents as he swam forward, and marked with a pallid breadth of foam his path out to sea, farther and farther out, till the mists hid him from human view.

The wailing song of Owny Hea rose through the wet air above the keening of the women in the bawn. But louder still was the voice of the lad who wore his father's ring, and drew now from beneath his mantle his father's sword.

"I am Donogh son of Murtogh *Mordha!*" he shouted, "and I am Lord in Dunlogher, and when I am of my full strength I will kill the King of Spain, and give his castles and all his lands and herds and women to you for your own!"

The three towers of Dunlogher are broken, and the witch has fled from its gray lake, and no man knows where the bones of its forgotten sept are buried. But the evil currents will never tire of writhing, and the shadows which are no shadows are forever changing, in the Path of Murty the Proud.

"There Is Sorrow on the Sea"

BY SIR GILBERT PARKER

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I

York Factory, Hudson's Bay.
23rd September, 1747.

MY DEAR COUSIN FANNY—It was a year last April Fool's Day, I left you on the sands there at Mablethorpe, no more than a stone's throw from the Book-in-Hand, swearing that you should never see or hear from me again. You remember how we saw the coastguards flash their lights here and there, as they searched the sands for me? how one came bundling down the bank, calling, "Who goes there?" and when I said, "A friend," he stumbled, and his light fell to the sands and went out, and in the darkness you and I stole away: you to your home, with a whispering, "God-bless-you, Cousin Dick," over your shoulder, and I with a bit of a laugh that, maybe, cut you to the heart, and that split in a sob in my own throat—though you didn't hear that.

'Twas a bad night's work that, Cousin Fanny, and maybe I wish it undone; and maybe I don't; but a devil gets into the heart of a man when he has to fly from the lass he loved, while the friends of his youth go hunting him with muskets, and he has to steal out of the back-door of his own country and shelter himself, like a cold sparrow, up in the eaves of the world.

Ay, lass, that's how I left the fens of Lincolnshire a year last April Fool's Day. There wasn't a dyke from Lincoln town to Mablethorpe that I hadn't crossed with a running jump; and there wasn't a break in the shore, or a sink-hole in the sand, or a clump of rushes, or a samphire bed, from Skegness to Theddlethorpe, that I didn't know like every line

of your face. And when I was a slip of a lad—ay, and later, too—how you and I used to snuggle into little nooks of the sand-hills, maybe just beneath the coastguard's hut, and watch the tide come swilling in—daisies you used to call the breaking surf, Cousin Fanny! And that was like you, always with a fancy about everything you saw. And when the ships, the fishing-smacks with their red sails, and the tall-masted brigs, went by, taking the white foam on their canvas, you used to wish that you might sail away to the lands you'd heard tell of from old skippers that gathered round my uncle's fire in the Book-in-Hand. Ay, a grand thing I thought it would be, too, to go riding round the world on a well-washed deck, with plenty of food and grog, and maybe, by-and-by, to be first mate, and lord it from fo'castle bunk to stern-rail!

You did not know, did you, who was the coastguardsman that stumbled as he came on us that night? It looked a stupid thing to do that, and let the lantern fall. But, lass, 'twas done o' purpose. That was the one man in all the parish that would ha' risked his neck to let me free. 'Twas Lancy Doane, who's give me as many beatings in his time as I him. We were always getting foul one o' t'other since I was big enough to shy a bit of turf at him across a dyke, and there isn't a spot on's body that I haven't hit, nor one on mine that he hasn't mauled. I've sat on his head, and he's had his knee in my stomach till I squealed, and we never could meet without back-talking and rasping 'gainst the grain. The night before he joined the coastguardsmen, he was down at the Book-in-Hand, and 'twas little like that I'd let the good chance pass—I might never have another; for Gover'ment folk will not easy work a quarrel on their own account. I mind him sittin' there on the settle, his shins against the fire, a long pipe going, and Casey of the "Lazy Beetle," and Jobbin the mate of the "Dodger," and Little Faddo, who had the fat Dutch wife down by the Ship Inn, and Whiggle the preaching blacksmith. And you were standin' with your back to the shinin' pewters, and the great jug of ale with the white napkin behind you; the light o' the fire wavin' on your face, and your look lost in the deep hollow o' the chimney. I think of you most as you were that

minute, Cousin Fanny, when I come in. I tell you straight and fair, that was the prettiest picture I ever saw; and I've seen some rare fine things in my travels. 'Twas as if the thing had been set by some one just to show you off to your best. Here you were, a slip of a lass, straight as a bulrush, and your head hangin' proud on your shoulders; yet modest too, as you can see off here in the North the top of the golden-rod flower swing on its stem. You were slim as slim, and yet there wasn't a corner on you; so soft and full and firm you were, like the breast of a quail; and I mind me how the shine of your cheeks was like the glimmer of an apple after you've rubbed it with a bit of cloth. Well, there you stood in some sort of smooth, plain, clingin' gown, a little bit loose and tumblin' at the throat, and your pretty foot with a brown slipper pushed out, just savin' you from bein' prim. That's why the men liked you—you didn't carry a sermon in your waist-ribbon, and the Lord's Day in the lift o' your chin; but you had a smile to give when 'twas the right time for it, and men never said things with *you* there that they'd have said before many another maid.

'Twas a thing I've thought on off here, where I've little to do but think, how a lass like you could put a finger on the lip of such rough tykes as Faddo, Jobbin, and the rest, keepin' their rude words under flap and button. Do you mind how, when I passed you comin' in, I laid my hand on yours as it rested on the dresser? That hand of yours wasn't a tiny bit of a thing, and the fingers weren't all taperin' like a simperin' miss from town, worked down in the mill of quality and got from graftin' and graftin', like one of them roses from the flower-house at Mablethorpe Hall—not fit to stand by one o' them that grew strong and sweet with no fancy color, in the garden o' the Book-in-Hand. Yours was a hand that talked as much as your lips or face, as honest and white; and the palm all pink, and strong as strong could be, and warmin' every thread in a man's body when he touched it. Well, I touched your hand then, and you looked at me and nodded, and went musin' into the fire again, not seemin' to hear our gabble.

But, you remember—don't you?—how Jobbin took to chaffin' of Lancy Doane, and how Faddo's tongue got sharper

as the time got on, and many a nasty word was said of coast-guards and excisemen, and all that had to do with law and gover'ment. Cuts there were at some of Lancy's wild doings in the past, and now and then they'd turn to me, saying what they thought would set me girdin' Lancy too. But I had my own quarrel, and I wasn't to be baited by such numskulls. And Lancy—that was a thing I couldn't understand—he did no more than shrug his shoulder and call for more ale, and wish them all good health and a hundred a year. I never thought he could ha' been so patient-like. But there was a kind of little smile, too, on his face, showin' he did some thinkin'; and I guessed he was bidin' his time.

I wasn't as sharp as I might ha' been, or I'd ha' seen what he was waitin' for, with that quiet provokin' smile on his face, and his eyes smoulderin' like. I don't know to this day whether you wanted to leave the room when you did, though 'twas about half after ten o'clock, later than I ever saw you there before. But when my uncle came in from Louth, and gave you a touch on the shoulder, and said: "To bed wi' you, my lass," you waited for a minute longer, glancin' round on all of us, at last lookin' steady at Lancy; and he got up from his chair, and took off his hat to you with a way he had. You didn't stay a second after that, but went away straight, sayin' good-night to all of us; but Lancy was the only one on his feet.

Just as soon as the door was shut behind you, Lancy turned round to the fire, and pushed the log with his feet in a way a man does when he's thinkin' a bit. And Faddo gave a nasty laugh, and said:

"Theer's a dainty sitovation. Theer's Mr. Thomas Doane, outlaw and smuggler, and theer's Mr. Lancy Doane, coast-guardsman. Now, if them two should 'appen to meet on Lincolnshire coast, Lord, theer's a sitovation for ye—Lord, theer's a cud to chew! Ere's one gentleman wants to try 'is 'and at 'elpin' Prince Charlie, and when 'is 'elp doesn't amount to anythink, what does the King on 'is throne say? He says, "As for Thomas Doane, Esquire, aw've doone wi' 'im!" And theer's another gentleman, Mr. Lancy Doane, Esquire. He turns pious, and says, "Aw'm goin' for a coast-guardsman!" What does the King on his throne say? 'E

says, "Theer's the man for me!" But aw says, "Aw've doone, aw've doone wid Mr. Lancy Doane, Esquire, and be damned to 'im." He! he! Theer's a fancy sitovation for ye. Mr. Thomas Doane, Esquire, smuggler and outlaw, an' Mr. Lancy Doane, Esquire, coastguardsman. Aw've doone. Ho! ho! That gits into my crop."

I tell you these things Cousin Fanny, because I'm doubtin' if you ever heard them, or knew exactly how things stood that night. I never was a friend of Lancy Doane, you understand, but it's only fair that the truth be told about that quarrel, for like as not he wouldn't speak himself, and your father was moving in and out; and, I take my oath, I wouldn't believe Faddo and the others if they were to swear on the Bible. Not that they didn't know the truth when they saw it, but they did love just to let their fancy run. I'm livin' over all the things that happened that night—livin' them over to-day, when everything's quiet about me here, so lonesome. I wanted to go over it all, bit by bit, and work it out in my head just as you and I used to do the puzzle games we played in the sands. And maybe, when you're a long way off from things you once lived, you can see them and understand them better. Out here, where it's so lonely, and yet so good a place to live in, I seem to get the hang o' the world better, and why some things are, and other things aren't; and I thought it would pull at my heart to sit down and write you a long letter, goin' over the whole business again; but it doesn't. I suppose I feel as a judge does when he goes over a lot of evidence, and sums it all up for the jury. I don't seem prejudiced one way or another. But I'm not sure that I've got all the evidence to make me ken everything; and that's what made me bitter wild the last time that I saw you. Maybe you hadn't anything to tell me, and maybe you had, and maybe, if you ever write to me out here, you'll tell me if there's anything I don't know about them days.

Well, I'll go back now to what happened when Faddo was speakin' at my uncle's bar. Lancy Doane was standin' behind the settle, leanin' his arms on it, and smokin' his pipe quiet. He waited patient till Faddo had done, then he comes round the settle, puts his pipe up in the rack between the

rafters, and steps in front of Faddo. If ever the devil was in a man's face, it looked out of Lancy Doane's that minute. Faddo had touched him on the raw when he fetched out that about Tom Doane. All of a sudden Lancy swings, and looks at the clock.

"It's half-past ten, Jim Faddo," he said, "and aw've got an hour an' a half to deal wi' you as a Lincolnshire lad. At twelve o'clock aw'm the Gover'ment's, but till then aw'm Lancy Doane, free to strike or free to let alone; to swallow dirt or throw it; to take a lie or give it. And now list to me; aw'm not goin' to eat dirt, and aw'm goin' to give you the lie, and aw'm goin' to break your neck, if I swing for it to-morrow, Jim Faddo. And here's another thing aw'll tell you. When the clock strikes twelve, on the best horse in the country aw'll ride to Theddlethorpe, straight for the well that's dug you know where, to find your smuggled stuff, and to run the irons round your wrists. Aw'm dealin' fair wi' you that never dealt fair by no man. You never had an open hand nor soft heart; and because you've made money, not out o' smugglin' alone, but out o' poor devils of smugglers that didn't know rightly to be rogues, you think to fling your dirt where you choose. But aw'll have ye to-night as a man, and aw'll have ye to-night as a King's officer, or aw'll go damned to hell."

Then he steps back a bit very shiny in the face, and his eyes like torchlights, but cool and steady. "Come on now," he says, "Jim Faddo, away from the Book-in-Hand, and down to the beach under the sand-hills, and we'll see man for man—though, come to think of it, y' are no man," he said—"if ye'll have the right to say when aw'm a King's officer that you could fling foul words in the face of Lancy Doane. And a word more," he says; "aw wouldn't trust ye if an Angel o' Heaven swore for ye. Take the knife from the belt behind your back there, and throw it on the table, for you wouldn't bide by no fair rules o' fightin'. Throw the knife on the table," he says, comin' a step forward.

Faddo got on to his feet. He was bigger built than Lancy, and a bit taller, and we all knew he was devilish strong in his arms. There was a look in his face I couldn't understand. One minute I thought it was fear, and another I

thought it was daze; and maybe it was both. But all on a sudden something horrible cunnin' come into it, and ugly too.

"Go to the well, then, since ye've found out *all* about it," he says, "but aw've an hour and a half start o' ye, Lancy Doane."

"Ye've less than that," says Lancy back to him, "if ye go with me to the sands first."

At that my uncle stepped in to say a word for peace-makin', but Lancy would have none of it. "Take the knife and throw it on the table," he said to Faddo once more, and Faddo took it out and threw it down.

"Come on, then," Faddo says, with a sneerin' laugh; "we'll see by daybreak who has the best o' this night's work," and he steps toward the door.

"Wait a minute," says Lancy, gettin' in front of him. "Now take the knife from your boot. Take it," he says again, "or aw will. That's like a man, to go to a fist-fight wi' knives. Take it," he said; "aw'll gi' ye till aw count four, and if ye doan't take it, aw'll take it meself. One!" he says steady and soft. "Two!" Faddo never moved. "Three!" The silence made me sick, and the clock ticked like hammers. "Four!" he said, and then he sprang for the boot, but Faddo's hand went down like lightnin', too. I couldn't tell exactly how they clinched, but once or twice I saw the light flash on the steel. Then they came down together, Faddo under, and when I looked again Faddo was lying eyes starin' wide, and mouth all white with fear, for Lancy was holding the knife-point at his throat. "Stir an inch," says Lancy, "and aw'll pin ye to the lid o' hell."

And three minutes by the clock he knelt there on Faddo's chest, the knife-point touching the bone in 's throat. Not one of us stirred, but just stood lookin', and my own heart beat so hard it hurt me, and my uncle steadyin' himself against the dresser. At last Lancy threw the knife away into the fire.

"Coward!" he said. "A man would ha' taken the knife. Did you think aw was goin' to gie my neck to the noose just to put your knife to proper use? But don't stir till aw gie you the word, or aw'll choke the breath o' life out o' ye."

At that Faddo sprung to clinch Lancy's arms, Lancy's fingers caught him in the throat, and I thought surely Faddo was gone, for his tongue stood out a finger-length, and he was black in the face.

"For God's sake, Lancy," said my uncle, steppin' forward, "let him go."

At that Lancy said, "He's right enough. It's not the first time aw've choked a coward. Throw cold water on him and gi' 'im brandy."

Sure enough, he wasn't dead. Lancy stood there watchin' us while we fetched Faddo back, and I tell you, that was a narrow squeak for him. When he got his senses again, and was sittin' there lookin' as if he'd been hung and brought back to life, Lancy says to him: "There, Jim Faddo, aw've done wi' you as a man, and at twelve o'clock aw'll begin wi' ye as King's officer." And at that, with a good-night to my uncle and all of us, he turns on his heels and leaves the Book-in-Hand.

I tell you, Cousin Fanny, though I'd been ripe for quarrel wi' Lancy Doane myself that night, I could ha' took his hand like a brother, for I never saw a man deal fairer wi' a scoundrel than he did wi' Jim Faddo. You see it wasn't what Faddo said about himself that made Lancy wild, but that about his brother Tom; and a man doesn't like his brother spoken ill of by dirt like Faddo, be it true or false. And of Lancy's brother I'm goin' to write further on in this letter, for I doubt that you know all I know about him, and the rest of what happened that night and afterwards.

. . . . . .

Dear Cousin Fanny—I canna write all I set out to, for word come to me, just as I wrote the last sentence above, that the ship was to leave port three days sooner than was fixed for when I began. I have been rare and busy since then, and I have no time to write more. And so 'twill be another year before you get a word from me; but I hope that when this letter comes you'll write one back to me by the ship that sails next summer from London. The summer's short and the winter's long here, Cousin Fanny, and there's more snow than grass; and there's more flowers in a week in Mablethorpe than in a whole year here. But, lass, the sun

shines always, and my heart keeps warm in thinkin' of you, and I ask you to forgive me for any harsh word I ever spoke, not forgettin' that last night when I left you on the sands, and stole away like a thief across the sea. I'm going to tell you the whole truth in my next letter, but I'd like you to forgive me before you know it all, for 'tis a right lonely and distant land, this, and who can tell what may come to pass in twice a twelvemonth! Maybe a prayer on lips like mine doesn't seem in place, for I've not lived as parson says man ought to live, but I think the Lord will have no worse thought o' me when I say, God bless thee, lass, and keep thee safe as any flower in His garden that He watereth with His own hand. Write to me, lass: I love thee still, I do love thee.

DICK ORRY.

II

THE BOOK-IN-HAND INN,
MABLETHORPE, LINCOLNSHIRE.
May-Day, 1749.

DEAR COUSIN DICK—I think I have not been so glad in many years as when I got your letter last Guy Fawkes Day. I was coming from the church where the parson preached on plots and treasons, and obedience to the King, when I saw the old postman coming down the road. I made quickly to him, I know not why, for I had not thought to hear from you, and before I reached him he held up his hand, showing me the stout packet which brought me news of you. I hurried with it to the inn, and went straight to my room and sat down by the window, where I used to watch for your coming with the fishing fleet, down the sea from the Dogger Bank. I was only a girl, a young girl, then, and the Dogger Bank was, to my mind, as far off as that place you call York Factory, in Hudson's Bay, is to me now. And yet I did not know how very far it was until our schoolmaster showed me on a globe how few days' sail it is to the Dogger Bank, and how many to York Factory.

But I will tell you of my reading of your letter, and of what I thought. But first I must go back a little. When you went away that wild, dark night, with bitter words on your

lips to me, Cousin Dick, I thought I should never feel the same again. You did not know it, but I was bearing the misery of your trouble and of another's also, and of my own as well; and so I said over and over again: Oh, why will men be hard on women? Why do they look for them to be iron like themselves, bearing double burdens as most women do? But afterward, I settled to a quietness which I would not have you think was happiness, for I have given up thought of that. Nor would I have you think me bearing trouble sweetly, for sometimes I was most hard and stubborn. But I lived on in a sort of stillness till that morning when, sitting by my window, I read all you had written to me. And first of all, I must tell you how my heart was touched at your words about our childhood together. I had not thought it lay so deep in your mind, Cousin Dick. It always stays in mine; but then, women have more memories than men. The story of that night I knew; but never fully as you have told it to me in your letter. Of what happened after Lancy Doane left the inn, of which you have not written, but promised the writing in your next letter, I think I know as well as yourself. Nay, more, Cousin Dick. There are some matters concerning what followed that night and after, which I know, and you do not know. But you have guessed there was something which I did not tell you, and so there was. And I will tell you of them now. But I will take up the thread of the story where you dropped it, and reel it out.

You left the inn soon after Lancy Doane, and James Faddo went then, too, riding hard for Theddlethorpe, for he knew that in less than an hour the coastguards would be rifling the hiding-places of his smuggled stuff. You did not take a horse, but, getting a musket, you walked the sands hard to Theddlethorpe.

I know it all, though you did not tell me, Cousin Dick. You had no purpose in going, save to see the end of a wretched quarrel and a smuggler's ill-scheme. You carried a musket for your own safety, not with any purpose. It was a day of weight in your own life, for on one side you had an offer from the Earl Fitzwilliam to serve on his estate; and on the other to take a share in a little fleet of fishing smacks, of which my father was part owner. I think you know to

which side I inclined, but that now is neither here nor there; and, though you did not tell me, as you went along the shore you were more intent on handing back and forth in your mind your own affairs, than of what should happen at Theddlethorpe. And so you did not hurry as you went, and, as things happened, you came to Faddo's house almost at the same moment with Lancy Doane and two other mounted coastguards.

You stood in the shadow while they knocked at Faddo's door. You were so near, you could see the hateful look in his face. You were surprised he did not try to stand the coastguards off. You saw him, at their bidding, take a lantern, and march with them to a shed standing off a little from the house, nearer to the shore. Going a round-about swiftly, you came to the shed first, and posted yourself at the little window on the sea-side. You saw them enter with the lantern, saw them shift a cider press, uncover the floor, and there beneath, in a dry well, were barrels upon barrels of spirits, and crouched among them was a man whom you all knew at once—Lancy's brother, Tom. That, Cousin Dick, was Jim Faddo's revenge. Tom Doane had got refuge with him till he should reach his brother, not knowing Lancy was to be coastguard. Faddo, coming back from Mablethorpe, told Tom the coastguards were to raid him that night; and he made him hide in this safe place, as he called it, knowing that Lancy would make for it.

For a minute after Tom was found no man stirred. Tom was quick of brain and wit—would it had always been put to good purposes!—and saw at once Faddo's treachery. Like winking he fired at the traitor, who was almost as quick to return the fire. What made you do it I know not, unless it was you hated treachery; but, sliding in at the open door behind the coastguards, you snatched the lantern from the hands of one, threw it out of the open door, and, thrusting them aside, called for Tom to follow you. He sprang toward you over Faddo's body, even as you threw the lantern, and catching his arm, you ran with him toward the dyke.

"Ready for a great jump!" you said; "your life hangs on it." He was even longer of leg than you. "Is it a dyke?" he whispered, as the shots from three muskets rang after

you. "A dyke. When I count three, jump," you answered. I have read somewhere of the great leap that one Don Alvarado, a Spaniard, made in Mexico, but surely never was a greater leap than you two made that night, landing safely on the other side, and making for the sea-shore. None of the coastguardsmen, not even Lancy, could make the leap, for he was sick and trembling, though he had fired upon his own brother. And so they made for the bridge some distance above, just as the faint moon slipped behind a cloud and hid you from their sight.

That is no country to hide in, as you know well—no caves, or hills, or mazy coombes—just a wide, flat, reedy place, broken by open wolds. The only refuge for both now was the sea. 'Twas a wild run you two made, side by side, down that shore, keeping close within the gloom of the sand-hills, the coastguards coming after, pressing you closer than they thought at the time, for Tom Doane had been wounded in the leg. But Lancy sent one back for the horses, he and the other coming on; and so, there you were, two and two. 'Twas a cruel task for Lancy that night, enough to turn a man's hair gray. But duty was duty, though those two lads were more to each other than most men ever are. You know how it ended. But I want to go all over it just to show you that I understand. You were within a mile of Mablethorpe, when you saw a little fishing smack come riding in, and you made straight for it. Who should be in the smack but Solby, the canting Baptist, who was no friend to you, or uncle, or any of us. You had not time for bargaining or coaxing, and so, at the musket's mouth, you drove him from the boat, and pushed it out just as Lancy and his men came riding up. Your sail was up, and you turned the lugger to the wind in as little time as could be, but the coastguardsmen rode after you, calling you to give in. No man will ever know the bitter trouble in Lancy's heart when he gave the order to fire on you, though he did not fire himself. And you—do I not know, Cousin Dick, what you did? Tom Doane was not the man to fire at the three dark figures riding you down, not knowing which was his brother. But you, you understood that; and you were in, you said to yourself, and you'd play the game out, come what would. You raised your musket

and drew upon a figure. At that moment a coastguard's musket blazed, and you saw the man you had drawn on was Lancy Doane. You lowered your musket, and as you did a ball struck you on the wrist.

Oh, I have thanked God a hundred times, dear Cousin Dick, that you fired no shot that night, but only helped a hunted, miserable man away, for you did get free. Just in the nick of time your sail caught the wind bravely, and you steered for the open sea. Three days from that, Tom Doane was safe at the Hague, and you were on your way back to Lincolnshire. You came by a fishing boat to Saltfleet Haven, and made your way down the coast toward Mablethorpe. Passing Theddlethorpe, you went up to Faddo's house, and, looking through the window, you saw Faddo, not dead, but being cared for by his wife. Then you came on to Mablethorpe, and standing under my window at the very moment when I was on my knees praying for the safety of those who traveled by sea, you whistled, like a quail from the garden below—the old signal. Oh, how my heart stood still a moment, and then leaped, for I knew it was you. I went down to the garden, and there you were. Oh, I *was* glad to see you, Cousin Dick!

You remember how I let you take me in your arms for an instant, and then I asked if *he* was safe. And when you told me that he was, I burst into tears, and I asked you many questions about him. And you answered them quickly, and then would have taken me in your arms again. But I would not let you, for then I knew—I knew that you loved me, and, oh, a dreadful feeling came into my heart, and I drew back, and could have sunk upon the ground in misery, but that there came a thought of your safety. *He* was safe, but you —you were here, where reward was set for you. I begged you to come into the house, that I might hide you there, but you would not. You had come for one thing, you said, and only one. An hour or two, and then you must be gone for London. And so you urged me to the beach. I was afraid we might be seen, but you led me away from the cottages near to the little bridge which crosses the dyke. By that way we came to the sands, as we thought unnoted. But no, who should it be to see us but that canting Baptist, Solby! And

so the alarm was given. You had come, dear Cousin Dick, to ask me one thing—if I loved you? and if, should you ever be free to come back, I would be your wife? I did not answer you; I could not answer you; and, when you pressed me, I begged you to have pity on me, and not to speak of it. You thought I was not brave enough to love a man open to the law. As if—as if I knew not that what you did came out of a generous, reckless heart! And on my knees—oh, on my knees—I ought to have thanked you for it. But I knew not what to say; my lips were closed. And just then shots were fired, and we saw the coastguards' lights. Then came Lancy Doane stumbling down the banks, and our parting—our parting. Your bitter laugh as you left me has rung in my ears ever since.

Do not think we have been idle here in your cause, for I myself went to Earl Fitzwilliam and told him the *whole* story, and how you had come to help Tom Doane that night. How do I know of it all? Because I have seen a letter from Tom Doane. Well, the Earl promised to lay your case before the King himself, and to speak for you with good eager entreaty. And so, it may be, by next time I write, there will go good news to you, and—will you then come back, dear Cousin Dick?

And I now want to tell you what I know, and what you do not know. Tom Doane had a wife in Mablethorpe. He married her when she was but sixteen—a child. But she was afraid of her father's anger, and her husband soon after went abroad, became one of Prince Charlie's men, and she's never seen him since. She never really loved him, but she never forgot that she was his wife; and she always dreaded his coming back; as well she might, for you see what happened when he did come. I pitied her, dear Cousin Dick, with all my heart; and when Tom Doane died on the field of battle in Holland last year, I wept with her and prayed for her. And you would have wept too, man though you are, if you had seen how grateful she was that he died in honorable fighting, and not in a smuggler's cave at Theddlethorpe. She blessed you for that, and she never ceases to work with me for the King's pardon for you.

There is no more to say now, dear Cousin Dick, save that I

would have you know I think of you with great desire of heart for your well-being, and I pray God for your safe return some day to the good country which, pardoning you, will cast you out no more.

I am, dear Cousin Dick,
Thy most affectionate Cousin,
FANNY.

P. S.—Dear Dick, my heart bursts for joy. Enclosed here is thy pardon, sent by the good Earl Fitzwilliam last night. I could serve him on my knees forever. Dick, she that was Tom Doane's wife, she loves thee. Wilt thou not come back to her? In truth, she always loved thee. She was thy cousin; she is thy Fanny. Now thou knowest all.

The Smugglers of the Clone

BY S. R. CROCKETT

The Smugglers of the Clone

BY S. R. CROCKETT

"*RISE, Robin, rise! The partans are on the sands!*" The crying at our little window raised me out of a sound sleep, for I had been out seeing the Myreside lasses late the night before, and was far from being wake-rife at two by the clock on a February morning.

It was the first time the summons had come to me, for I was then but young. Hitherto it was my brother John who had answered the raising word of the free-traders spoken at the window. But now John had a farm-steading of his own, thanks to Sir William Maxwell and to my father's siller that had paid for the stock.

So with all speed I did my clothes upon me, with much eagerness and a beating heart—as who would not, when, for the first time, he has the privilege of man? As I went out to the barn I could hear my mother (with whom I was ever a favorite) praying for me.

"Save the laddie—save the laddie!" she said over and over.

And I think my father prayed too; but, as I went, he also cried to me counsels.

"Be sure you keep up the grappling chains—dinna let them clatter till ye hae the stuff weel up the hill. The Lord keep ye! Be a guid lad an' ride honestly. Gin ye see Sir William, keep your head doon, an' gae by withoot lookin'. He's a magistrate, ye ken. But he'll no' see you, gin ye dinna see him. Leave twa ankers a-piece o' brandy an' rum at our ain dyke back. An' abune a', the Lord be wi' ye, an' bring ye safe back to your sorrowing parents!"

So, with pride, I did the harness graith upon the sonsy back of Brown Bess—the pad before where I was to sit—the lingtow and the hooked chains behind. I had a cutlass, a jockteleg (or smuggler's sheaf-knife), and a pair of brass-

mounted pistols ready swung in my leathern belt. Faith, but I wish Bell of the Mains could have seen me then, ready to ride forth with the light-horsemen. She would never scorn me more for a lingle-backed callant, I 'se warrant.

"Haste ye, Robin! Heard ye no' that the partans are on the sands?"

It was Geordie of the Clone who cried to me. He meant the free-traders from the Isle, rolling the barrels ashore.

"I am e'en as ready as ye are yoursel'!" I gave him answer, for I was not going to let him boast himself prideful all, because he had ridden out with them once or twice before. Besides, his horse and accoutrement were not one half so good as mine. For my father was an honest and well-considered man, and in good standing with the laird and the minister, so that he could afford to do things handsomely.

We made haste to ride along the heuchs, which are very high, steep, and rocky at this part of the coast.

And at every loaning-end we heard the clinking of the smugglers chains, and I thought the sound a livening and a merry one.

"A fair guid-e'en and a full tide, young Airyolan!" cried one to me as we came by Killantrae. And I own the name was sweet to my ears. For it was the custom to call men by the names of their farms, and Airyolan was my father's name by rights. But mine for that night, because in my hands was the honor of the house.

Ere we got down to the Clone we could hear, all about in the darkness, athwart and athwart, the clattering of chains, the stir of many horses, and the voices of men.

Black Taggart was in with his lugger, the "Sea Pyet," and such a cargo as the Clone men had never run—so ran the talk on every side. There was not a sleeping wife nor yet a man left indoors in all the parish of Mochrum, except only the laird and the minister.

By the time that we got down by the shore, there was quite a company of the Men of the Fells, as the shore men called us—all dour, swack, determined fellows.

"Here come the hill nowt!" said one of the village men, as he caught sight of us. I knew him for a limber-tongued, ill-livered loon from the Port, so I delivered him a blow fair

and solid between the eyes, and he dropped without a gurgle. This was to learn him how to speak to innocent harmless strangers.

Then there was a turmoil indeed to speak about, for all the men of the laigh shore crowded round us, and knives were drawn. But I cried, "Corwald, Mochrum, Chippermore, here to me!" And all the stout lads came about me.

Nevertheless, it looked black for a moment, as the shore men waved their torches in our faces, and yelled fiercely at us to put us down by fear.

Then a tall young man on a horse rode straight at the crowd which had gathered about the loon I had felled. He had a mask over his face which sometimes slipped awry. But, in spite of the disguise, he seemed perfectly well known to all there.

"What have we here?" he asked, in a voice of questioning that had also the power of command in it.

"'Tis these Men of the Fells that have stricken down Jock Webster of the Port, Maister William!" said one of the crowd.

Then I knew the laird's son, and did my duty to him, telling him of my provocation, and how I had only given the rascal strength of arm.

"And right well you did," said Maister William, "for these dogs would swatter in the good brandy, but never help to carry it to the caves, nor bring the well-graithed horses to the shore-side! Carry the loon away, and stap him into a heather hole till he come to."

So that was all the comfort they got for their tale-telling.

"And you, young Airyolan," said Maister William, "that are so ready with your strength of arm—there is even a job that you may do. Muckle Jock, the Preventive man, rides to-night from Isle of Whithorn, where he has been warning the revenue cutter. Do you meet him and keep him from doing himself an injury."

"And where shall I meet him, Maister William?" I asked of the young laird.

"Oh, somewhere on the heuch-taps," said he, carelessly; "and see, swing these on your horse and leave them at Myrtoun on the by-going."

He called a man with a torch, who came and stood over me, while I laid on Brown Bess a pair of small casks of some fine liqueur, of which more than ordinary care was to be taken, and also a few packages of soft goods, silks and laces as I deemed.

"Take these to the Loch Yett, and ca' Sandy Fergus to stow them for ye. Syne do your work with the Exciseman as he comes hame. Gar him bide where he is till the sun be at its highest to-morrow. And a double share o' the plunder shall be lyin' in the hole at a back of the dyke at Airyolan when ye ride hame the morn at e'en."

So I bade him a good-night, and rode my ways over the fields, and across many burns to Myrtoun. As I went I looked back, and there, below me, was a strange sight,—all the little harbor of the Clone lighted up, a hurrying of men down to the shore, the flickering of torches, and the lappering of the sea making a stir of gallant life that set the blood leaping along the veins. It was, indeed, I thought, worth while living to be a free-trader. Far out, I could see the dark spars of the lugger "Sea Pyet," and hear the casks and ankers dumping into the boats alongside.

Then I began to bethink me that I had a more desperate ploy than any of them that were down there, for they were many, and I was but one. Moreover, easily, as young Master William might say, "Meet Muckle Jock, and keep him till the morn at noon!" the matter was not so easy as supping one's porridge.

Now, I had never seen the Exciseman, but my brother had played at the cudgels with Jock before this. So I knew more of him than to suppose that he would bide for the bidding of one man when in the way of his duty.

But when the young laird went away he slipped me a small, heavy packet.

"Half for you and half for the gauger, gin he hears reason," he said.

By the weight and the jingle I judged it to be yellow Geordies, the best thing that the wee, wee German lairdie ever sent to Tory Mochrun. And not too plenty there, either! Though since the Clone folk did so well with the clean-run smuggling from the blessed Isle of Man, it is

true that there are more of the Geordies than there used to be.

So I rode round by the back of the White Loch, for Sir William had a habit of daunering, over by the Airlour and Barsalloch, and in my present ride I had no desire to meet with him.

Yet, as fate would have it, I was not to win clear that night. I had not ridden more than half-way round the loch when Brown Bess went floundering into a moss-hole, which are indeed more plenty than paved roads in that quarter. And what with the weight of the pack, and her struggling, we threatened to go down altogether. When I thought of what my father would say, if I went home with my finger in my mouth, and neither Brown Bess nor yet a penny's-worth to be the value of her, I was fairly a-sweat with fear. I cried aloud for help, for there were cot-houses near by. And, as I had hoped, in a little a man came out of the shadows of the willow bushes.

"What want ye, yochel?" said he, in a mightily lofty tone.

"I'll *'yochel'* ye, gin I had time. Pu' on that rope," I said, for my spirit was disturbed by the accident. Also, as I have said, I took ill-talk from no man.

So, with a little laugh, the man laid hold of the rope, and pulled his best, while I took off what of the packages I could reach, ever keeping my own feet moving, to clear the sticky glaur of the bog-hole from them.

"Tak that hook out, and ease doon the cask, man!" I cried to him, for I was in desperation; "I'll gie ye a heartsome gill, even though the stuff be Sir William's!"

And the man laughed again, being, as I judged, well enough pleased. For all that service yet was I not pleased to be called "yochel." But, in the meantime, I saw not how, at the moment, I could begin to cuff and clout one that was helping my horse and stuff out of a bog-hole. Yet I resolved somehow to be even with him, for, though a peaceable man, I never could abide the calling of ill names.

"Whither gang ye?" said he.

"To the Muckle Hoose o' Myrtoun," said I, "and gang you wi' me, my man; and gie me a hand doon wi' the stuff, for I hae nae stomach for mair warsling in bog-holes. And

wha kens but that auld thrawn Turk, Sir William, may happen on us?"

"Ken ye Sir William Maxwell?" said the man.

"Na," said I. "I never so muckle as set e'en on the auld wretch. But I had sax hard days' wark cutting doon bushes, and makin' a road for his daftlike carriage wi' wheels, for him to ride in to Mochrum Kirk."

"Saw ye him never there?" said the man, as I strapped the packages on again.

"Na," said I, "my faither is a Cameronian, and gangs to nae Kirk hereaboots."

"He has gi'en his son a bonny upbringing, then!" quoth the man.

Now this made me mainly angry, for I cannot bide that folk should meddle with my folk. Though as far as I am concerned myself I am a peaceable man.

"Hear ye," said I, "I ken no wha ye are that speers so mony questions. Ye may be the de'il himsel', or ye may be the enemy o' Mochrum, the blackavised Commodore frae Glasserton. But, I can warrant ye that ye'll no mell and claw unyeuked with Robin o' Airyolan. Hear ye that, my man, and keep a civil tongue within your ill-lookin' cheek, gin ye want to gang hame in the morning wi' an uncracked croun!"

The man said no more, and by his gait I judged him to be some serving man. For, as far as the light served me, he was not so well put on as myself. Yet there was a kind of neatness about the creature that showed him to be no outdoor man either.

However, he accompanied me willingly enough till we came to the Muckle House of Myrtoun. For I think that he was feared of his head at my words. And indeed it would not have taken the kittling of a flea to have garred me draw a staff over his crown. For there is nothing that angers a Galloway man more than an ignorant, upsetting town's body, putting in his gab when he desires to live peaceable.

So, when we came to the back entrance, I said to him: "Hear ye to this. Ye are to make no noise, my mannie, but gie me a lift doon wi' thae barrels cannily. For that dour old tod, the laird, is to ken naething aboot this. Only Miss

Peggy and Maister William, they ken. 'Deed, it was young William himsel' that sent me on this errand."

So with that the mannie gave a kind of laugh, and helped me down with the ankers far better than I could have expected. We rolled them into a shed at the back of the stables, and covered them up snug with some straw and some old heather thatching.

"Ay, my lad," says I to him, "for a' your douce speech and fair words I can see that ye hae been at this job afore!"

"Well, it is true," he said, "that I hae rolled a barrel or two in my time."

Then, in the waft of an eye I knew who he was. I set him down for Muckle Jock, the Excise officer, that had never gone to the Glasserton at all, but had been lurking there in the moss, waiting to deceive honest men. I knew that I needed to be wary with him, for he was, as I had heard, a sturdy carl, and had won the last throw at the Stoneykirk wrestling. But all the men of the Fellside have an excellent opinion of themselves, and I thought I was good for any man of the size of this one.

So said I to him: "Noo, chiel, ye ken we are no' juist carryin' barrels o' spring water at this time o' nicht to pleasure King George. Hearken ye: we are in danger of being laid by the heels in the jail of Wigton gin the black lawyer corbies get us. Noo, there's a Preventive man that is crawling and spying ower by on the heights o' Physgill. Ye maun e'en come wi' me an' help to keep him oot o' hairm's way. For it wad not be for his guid that he should gang doon to the port this nicht!"

The man that I took to be the gauger hummed and hawed a while, till I had enough of his talk and unstable ways.

"No back-and-forrit ways wi' Robin," said I. "Will ye come and help to catch the King's officer, or will ye not?"

"No' a foot will I go," says he. "I have been a King's officer, myself!"

Whereupon I laid a pistol to his ear, for I was in some heat.

"Gin you war King Geordie himsel', aye, or Cumberland either, ye shall come wi' me and help to catch the gauger," said I.

For I bethought me that it would be a bonny ploy, and one long to be talked about in these parts, thus to lay by the heels the Exciseman and make him tramp to Glasserton to kidnap himself.

The man with the bandy legs was taking a while to consider, so I said to him: "She is a guid pistol and new primed!"

"I'll come wi' ye!" said he.

So I set him first on the road, and left my horse in the stables of Myrtoun. It was the gloam of the morning when we got to the turn of the path by which, if he were to come at all, the new gauger would ride from Glasserton. And lo! as if we had set a tryst, there he was coming over the heathery braes at a brisk trot. So I covered him with my pistol, and took his horse by the reins, thinking no more of the other man I had taken for the gauger before.

"Dismount, my lad," I said. "Ye dinna ken me, but I ken you. Come here, my brisk landlouper, and help to haud him!"

I saw the stranger who had come with me sneaking off, but with my other pistol I brought him to a stand. So together we got the gauger into a little thicket or planting. And here, willing or unwilling, we kept him all day, till we were sure that the stuff would all be run, and the long trains of honest smugglers on good horses far on their way to the towns of the north.

Then very conscientiously I counted out the half of the tale of golden guineas Master William had given me, and put them into the pocket of the gauger's coat.

"Gin ye are a good, still-tongued kind of cattle, there is more of that kind of yellow oats where these came from," said I. "But lie ye here snug as a paitrick for an hour yet by the clock, lest even yet ye should come to harm!"

So there we left him, not very sorely angered, for all he had posed as so efficient and zealous a King's officer.

"Now," said I to the man that had helped me, "I promised ye half o' Maister William's guineas, that he bade me keep, for I allow that it micht hae been a different job but for

your help. And here they are. Ye shall never say that Robin of Airyolan roguit ony man—even a feckless toon's birkie wi' bandy legs!"

The man laughed and took the siller, saying, "Thank'ee!" with an arrogant air as if he handled bags of them every day. But, nevertheless, he took them, and I parted from him, wishing him well, which was more than he did to me. But I know how to use civility upon occasion.

When I reached home I told my father, and described the man I had met. But he could make no guess at him. Nor had I any myself till the next rent day, when my father, having a lame leg where the colt had kicked him, sent me down to pay the owing. The factor I knew well, but I had my money in hand and little I cared for him. But what was my astonishment to find, sitting at the table with him, the very same man who had helped me to lay the Exciseman by the heels. But now, I thought, there was a strangely different air about him.

And what astonished me more, it was this man, and not the factor, who spoke first to me.

Aye, young Robin of Airyolan, and are you here? Ye are a chiel with birr and smeddum! There are the bones of a man in ye! Hae ye settled with the gauger for shackling him by the hill of Physgill?"

Now, as I have said, I thole snash from no man, and I gave him the word back sharply.

"Hae ye settled wi' him yoursel', sir? For it was you that tied the tow rope!"

My adversary laughed, and looked not at all ill-pleased.

He pointed to the five gold Georges on the tables.

"Hark ye, Robin of Airyolan, these are the five guineas ye gied to me like an honest man. I'll forgie ye for layin' the pistol to my lug, for after all ye are some credit to the land that fed ye. Gin ye promise to wed a decent lass, I'll e'en gie ye a farm o' your ain. And as sure as my name is Sir William Maxwell, ye shall sit your lifetime rent free, for the de'il's errand that ye took me on the nicht of the brandy-running at the Clone."

I could have sunken through the floor when I heard that it was Sir William himself—whom, because he had so re-

cently returned from foreign parts after a sojourn of many years, I had never before seen.

Then both the factor and the laird laughed heartily at my discomfiture.

"Ken ye o' ony lass that wad tak' up wi' ye, Robin?" said Sir William.

"Half a dozen o' them, my lord," said I. "Lassies are neither ill to seek nor hard to find when Robin of Airyolan gangs a-cortin'!"

"Losh preserve us!" cried the laird, slapping his thigh, "but I mysel' never sallied forth to woo a lass so blithely confident!"

I said nothing, but dusted my knee-breeks. For the laird was no very good-looking man, being gray as a badger.

"An' mind ye maun see to it that the bairns are a' loons, and as staunch and stark as yoursel'!" said the factor.

"A man can but do his best," answered I, very modestly as I thought. For I never can tell why it is that the folk will always say that I have a good opinion of myself. But neither, on the other hand, can I tell why I should not.

"That There Mason"

BY W. CLARK RUSSELL

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I WAS in Ramsgate, in the pier-yard, and noticed the figure of a boatman leaning against the wall of a building used by the Trinity people. I stepped close, and looked at him. He was a little man, curved; his hands were buried to the knuckles' end in his breeches pockets; he wore a yellow sou'wester, and under it was a sour, sneering, wicked face. His eyes were damp and sunk, and seemed to discharge a thin liquor like pale ale, and he would not pull out his hands to wipe them.

"What's your name?" said I.

He looked at me slowly, beginning at my waistcoat, and answered: "What's that got to do with you?"

"Do you want a job?"

"What sorter job?" he replied, continuing to lean against the wall, without any motion of his body, merely looking at me.

"The job of answering a civil question with a civil answer," said I.

He turned his head, and gazed at the sea without replying.

"What's that obelisk?" said I.

His head came back to its bearings, and he answered: "What's what?"

"That thing in granite, yonder; that tall stone spike. What is it?"

"Can yer read?"

"Better than you, I expect," I answered.

"Then why don't you go and find out for yourself?" said he, uttering a small, hideous laugh.

"I rather fancy," said I, "that that spike was erected to commemorate the landing of George IV. He was kind enough to condescend to land at Ramsgate. Wasn't that

good of him, Tommy? Blown here, maybe, vomiting, to the pier-head, and rejoicing, under his waistcoats, to get ashore anywhere and anyhow. And the snobs of Ramsgate go to the expense of erecting that unwholesome and shocking memorial of so abject a trifle as the landing of a fat immoral man at this port on his way to London. Why don't you, and the like of you, level it—knock the blamed thing into blocks of stone, and build a house with them for a good man to live in?"

His eyes had come to the surface; they were running harder than ever. He was in a rage.

"Look here," said he; "I don't know who y' are, but don't yer like that there pillar?"

"No," I answered.

"Then why don't yer go home? There's nothen' to keep yer 'ere, I 'ope? Plenty of trains to all parts, and I'll carry yer bag for nothen', allowin' you've got one, only for the satisfaction of seein' the last of yer."

I told him I would remember that, and, bursting into uncontrollable laughter at his peculiarly ugly, wicked face, I walked off, scarce knowing but that I should feel the blow of "'arf a brick" in the back of my head as I went.

I met a boatman with whom I had gone fishing on some occasions.

"Thomas," said I, pointing to the leaning figure, "who is that queer little chap?"

"Jimmie Mason," replied Thomas, with a half-glance at the wall-scab, then turning his back upon it.

"Has he ever been hung?" said I.

"Don't think he could have been quite old enough for it," he replied, turning again to look at the little man. "They cut a man down from the gibbet on the sand hills yonder," said he, pointing in the direction of Deal, "when my father was a boy, and he used to say that, when the man got sprung, he'd relate, in beautiful language, how he felt when he was turned off."

"A dose of turning-off would do that gent in the sou'-wester a great deal of good," said I. "He's a sort of man, you know, to murder you when you're out fishing with him.

He's a sort of man to stab you in the back with a great clasp knife, and drag your body into the empty house, which never lets ever after."

"Old Jim Mason's just the worst-tempered man on the coast. His heart was turned black by a disappointment," said Thomas.

"Love?" said I.

"Why, not exactly love," he replied; "it was more in the hovelling line."

"Is it a good yarn?" I asked. "If so, I'll stand two drinks; a pint for you and a half-pint for me."

"It might be worth recording," said Thomas, taking the time occupied by the harbor clock in striking twelve to reflect. "Anyways, pint or no pint, here it is," and, folding his arms, this intelligent "longshoreman" started thus:

"Some years ago, a gemman and a lady went out for a sail, and, as is not always customary in these 'ere parts—though we've got some thick heads among us, I can tell you,—they were capsized. The gemman was drowned, the lady and the boatman saved, and the boat was picked up and towed in—there she lies, "The 'Arbour Bud."

"The widder, as was natural, was in dreadful grief; and, in a day or two, police bills was pasted about the walls, offering a reward of 50*l.* to any one who should recover the body. That there Mason, as you see a-leaning agin that house, was just the party for a job of this sort. He called 'em soft jobs. He was one of them men as would walk about the rocks and sands arter a breeze of wind, hunting for whatever he might find—be it a corpse that had come ashore to keep him in good spirits, or the 'arf of a shoe. Him and Sam Bowler was a-huntin' arter jewelery down among the rocks one day, and that there Mason picked up a gold ring. He offered it to Bowler, who gave him five shullens for it, and that night, at the sign of the 'Welcome 'Arp,' that there Mason swallowed some of his front teeth, and got both eyes plugged, for Bowler, who weighs fourteen stun, had discovered that the ring was brass.

"Well, that there Mason takes it into his head to go for a walk one day arter the bills about the body had been pasted on the walls. He walked in the direction of Broadstairs,

and, comin' to the coastguard station, he falls in with one of the men, a sort of relation of his. They got yarning. The coastguard had a big telescope under his arm. That there Mason asked leave to have a look, and he levels the glass and begins to work about with it. The line of the Good'in Sands was as plain as the nose on his face. It was low water, the whole stretch of the shoal was visible, and it was a clear bright afternoon.

"'What's taken yer heye?' says the coastguard presently.

"'Nothen, oh, nothen," answered that there Mason. 'Sands show oncommon plain to-day.'

"He handed back the glass to the coastguard, and then, instead of continuing his walk, he returned to this here yard, and got into his boat and pulled away out of the harbor.

"Now what do yer think he had seen in that telescope? A dead man stranded on the Good'in Sands. There could be no mistake. That there Mason belonged to the cocksure lot; *he* never made a blunder in all his life. It mightn't be the body as was advertised for, but, if it was, 'twas a fifty-pound job; and that there Mason, without a word, pulled out o' 'arbor feelin', I daresay, as if he'd got the gold in his pocket, and the heavens was beginnin' to smile upon him.

"'Tis a long pull to the Good'ins, tide or no tide. None took any notice of his goin' out. There was some boats a-fishin' in Pegwell Bay, and if any man looked at that there Mason a-rowing out to sea, he'd expect to see him bring up and drop a line over the side. He rowed and rowed. The body lay upon the edge of the Sand, a long distance away from the Gull lightship. He rowed and rowed. By and by, standin' up, he pulls out a bit of a pocket-glass, and then discovers that what he'd taken to be a man's dead body was nothen but a small balk of timber, black with black seaweed, stretched out on either side, so that at a distance it looked exactly like a corpse on its back with its arms out.

"That there Mason might ha' burst himself with passion if he hadn't been too dead beat with rowing. Even in them times he wasn't no chicken. Well, thinks he to himself, since I've had all this here labor merely to view a balk of timber, I may as well step ashore for a spell of rest, and take a short cruise round, for who knows what I might find? So

what does the joker do but head his boat right in for the sand, and then he jumps ashore. He made his boat fast to the balk of timber. It was arter five, and the sun westerin' fast. He drives his 'ands deep into his pockets, and slowly meanders, always a-looking. What was there to find? *He* couldn't tell. There was expectation, yer see, and that was a sort of joy to the 'eart of that there Mason. Y'u'd hardly think it of a boatman, but it's true: whilst that bally idiot was a-wandering about them sands searching for whatever there might be, his boat, giving a tug at her painter, frees the rope and drifts away on the tide, with that there man as you are now a-looking at walking about the sands, his 'ands buried deep and his eyes fixed, dreaming of lighting upon a sovereign or a gold chain—you can never tell what passes in such an 'ead. By'm-by he turns to look for his boat, and lo and be'old she's gone. There she was half a mile off, quietly floating away to the norr'ard. The sun was beginning to sink low; the night was coming along. The people aboard the Gull lightship didn't see him or take any notice; what was that there Mason going to do? There was no wreck to shelter him. It might be that at Ramsgate they'd see a lonely man a-walking about, and send a boat; but, as I've said, dusk was at 'and, and he knew bloomin' well that if they didn't see him soon they'd never see him again.

"He'd taken notice afore the darkness had drawn down of a cutter bearing about northeast. He watched her now whilst it was light, for it looked to him as if she was making a straight course for the sands. It was plain she wasn't under no government. The wind blew her along, and at eight o'clock that evening, when the moon was rising and the tide making fast all about the sands, I'm blest if that cutter didn't come quietly ashore, and lie as sweetly still as if she was a young woman wore out with walkin'.

"I allow that it didn't take that there Mason a lifetime to scramble aboard of her. She was a fine boat, 'bout sixteen or eighteen ton, newly sheathed, and her sails shone white and new in the moon. When he got aboard he sung out, 'Anybody here?' and he received no reply. There was a bit of a forehatch; he put his 'ead into it and sung out, and several times he sung out, and got no answer; he then walked

aft. I must tell you, it was a very quiet night, with a light breeze and plenty of stars, and a growing moon. He looks through the bit of a skylight, and sees nothen; puts his head in the companion-way and sings out as afore. An abandoned wessel, he thinks to himself, and his 'eart, you may be sure, turns to and rejoices.

"What should he do? Try to kedge her off himself? That was beyond him. Send up a rocket, if he should find such a thing in the vessel? S'elp me, he was that greedy he couldn't make up his mind to ask for 'elp. He took a look round the sea and considered. There was some big lump of shadow out behind the sands—she looked like a French smack; his boat was out of sight in the dark, but the cutter, he noticed, carried a little jolly boat, amidships, right fair in the wake of the gangway, easy to be launched, smack fashion, so that there Mason felt his life was saved.

"He carried some lucifers in his pocket for lighting his pipe; he stepped into the cabin, and struck a light. A lamp was hung up close against his 'and; it was ready trimmed, and he set the wick afire, and looked round. What did he see? As beautiful a little cabin as the hinvention of man could figure. The sides of the wessel had been picked out by artists, and that there Mason swears no man ever saw finer pictures in his life—ladies a-bathin', gentlemen chasin' with hounds, a steamer going along; both sides had been picked out into pictures, and that there Mason looked around him with his mouth opening and opening. There was likewise lookin' glasses; a thick carpet; the lamps seemed to be made of silver, and there was such a twinkling of silver all about, what with the 'andles of doors and a lot of forks and spoons on the table, that Mason's eyes began to dance in his evil old nut, and he reckoned himself a made man for life. Look at him as he leans there.

"But what else did he see? The door of a cabin right aft stood open, and half-way in and half-way out lay the body of a man; his throat was most horribly cut; not by 's own 'hand. No man could nearly cut his own 'ead half off as that chap's was. He'd been murdered, and there was no man in that beautiful little cutter saving that bleedin' corpse. It was a sight to have thickened the wind-pipe of most men,

and set them a-breathin' hard and tight; but *he* saw nothing but a man with his throat cut. He took a look at him, and reckoned him to be a furriner, as, indeed, the whole little ship seemed. It was a very quiet night, and he stood looking at the dead body considering what he should do. If he brought assistance from the shore, and the cutter was towed into port, his share of the salvage money—for the rewards are small in jobs of this sort when the weather is fine and there is no risk of life—his share, I says, of the money would be scarcely worth talking about. Same time, if he left the cutter to lie, and it came on to blow, she'd go to pieces afore the morning. That wasn't his consarn, he thought; he had come to the Good'ins on the look-out for a job, and had got one, and he made up his mind to make the most of his chances.

"So the first thing that there Mason did was to stoop down and plunder the body. Plenty was on it. I can see in fancy the looks of his face as he 'elped himself; he found a beautiful gold watch and chain, a diamond ring, and another ring, a lot of gold coins in French money in one pocket, and French money in silver coin in another. He found a silver toothpick, an eye-glass, and I can't tell you what besides. He was in high feather, a very 'appy man; he fills his pockets with the forks and spoons, supposing them silver, tho' they wasn't. He looked into the cabin where the dead body lay, but found nothen but bed-clothes and male wearin' apparel hangin' to the bulkhead. There was a chest of drawers full of good linen shirts and vests and the like of that. But that there Mason thought of Cocky Honour, the Customs man, and abandoned the idea of makin' up them shirts into a parcel.

"It was his notion to get away in the cutter's jolly boat or dinghey, and he stood looking about him to see if there was anything else he could put in his pockets. All at once he heard a noise of men's voices alongside, and, immediately arter, the 'eavy tread of fishermen's boots over'ead. Afore he could get on deck, a big chap, with a red night-cap on, came down the little companion-ladder, and instantly roars out something in French. Down comes others—three or four. 'Twas a minute or two afore they took notice of the

Mason, who stared back. They then set up a howl, and fell a-brandishing their arms, as if they were gone stark mad.

"'You killee him!' roars one.

"'No, no,' sings out Mason, 'me no killee, me find him killee.'

"'You killee him,' roars the great man with the cap, lookin' most ferocious, for that here Mason says his face was nearly all hair, besides that he squinted most damnably, beggin' of your pardon. And then he began to shout to the others, who shouted back at him, all talkin' at the top of their voices, as is the custom in France when excited, and all lookin' at that there Mason.

"Suddenly they all rushed at him, knocked him down, overhauled his pockets, and brought out the spoons and forks and the dead gent's gold watch and chain, and the rest of the plunder.

"'You killee!' roared the big man in the cap, and layin' hold of him, they ran him into the cabin where the corpse was, and locked him up with the body, and presently that there Mason, who was next door to ravin' mad, felt that they was warping the cutter off—that, in short, she *was* off, and, by the noise of passin' waters, either sailing or in tow.

"And now to end this, sir, what do you think happened to that there Mason? She was a French smack that had sighted and boarded the cutter; that was a Frenchman likewise, and they towed her straight to Boulogne, at which place they arrived at about ten o'clock in the morning. Numbers was on the pier to see the uncommon sight of a smack towing an abandoned cutter. That there Mason was handed over to the authorities, charged with murder and robbery. The British Consul took up the case. When the facts were stated, and inquiries made, his innocence was established; but not afore he'd lain three weeks in a beastly jail, fed on black bread, and denied his pipe. I don't say he came home much changed; but I allow the disappointment sunk as deep as his heart, and blacked it. And to this hour he's not fit company for man nor beast. Look at him as he leans!"

Laughing together, we strolled off for our drinks, and I saw Mason turn his head to watch us as we walked.

The Hand on the Latch

BY MARY CHOLMONDELEY

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There came a man across the moor,
Fell and foul of face was he.
He left the path by the cross-roads three,
And stood in the shadow of the door.

MARY COLERIDGE.

SHE stood at her low window with its uneven wavering glass, and looked out across the prairie. A little snow had fallen—not much, only enough to add a sense of desolation to the boundless plain, the infinite plain outside the four cramped walls of her log hut. The log hut was like a tiny boat moored in some vast, tideless, impassable sea. The immensity of the prairie had crushed her in the earlier years of her married life, but gradually she had become accustomed to it, then reconciled to it, at last almost a part of it. The gray had come early to her thick hair, a certain fixity to the quiet courage of her eyes. Her calm, steadfast face showed that she was not given to depression, but nevertheless this evening, as she stood watching for her husband's return, for the first distant speck of him where the cart rut vanished into the plain, a sense of impending misfortune enfolded her with the dusk. Was it because the first snow had fallen? Ah me! how much it meant. It was as significant for her as the gray pallor that falls on a sick man's face. It meant the endless winter, the greater isolation instead of the lesser, the powerlessness to move hand or foot in that all-enveloping shroud; the struggle, not for existence—with him beside her that was assured—not for luxury—she had ceased to care for it, though he had not ceased to care for her sake—but for life in any but its narrowest sense. Books, letters, human speech, through the long months these

would be almost entirely denied her. The sudden remembrance of the larger needs of life flooded her soul, touching to momentary semblance of movement many things long cherished, but long since dead, like delicate sea plants beyond high-water mark that cannot exist between the long droughts when the neap tide does not come. She had known what she was doing when against the wishes of her family she of the South had married him of the North, when she left the busy city life she knew, and clave to her husband, following him over the rim of the world, as women will follow while they have feet to follow with. She was his superior in birth, cultivation, refinement, but she had never regretted what she had done. The regrets were his for her, for the poverty to which he had brought her, and to which she had not been accustomed. She had only one regret, if such a thin strip of a word as regret can be used to describe her passionate controlled desolation, immense as the prairie, because she had no child. Perhaps if they had had children the walls of the log hut in the waste might have closed in on them less rigidly. It might have become more of a home.

Her mind had taken its old mechanical bent, the trend of long habit as she looked out from that low window. How often she had stood there, and thought "If only we might have had a child." And now by sheer force of habit she thought it yet again. And then a slow rapture took possession of her whole being, mounted, mounted till she leaned against the window-sill faint with joy. She was to have a child after all. She had hardly dared believe it at first, but as time had gone on a vague hope, quickly suppressed as unbearable, had turned to suspense, suspense had alternated with the fierce despair that precedes certainty. Certainty had come at last, clear and calm and exquisite as dawn. She would have a child in the spring. What was the winter to her now! Nothing but a step toward joy. The world was all broken up and made new. The prairie, its great loneliness, its deathlike solitude, were gone out of her life. She was to have a child in the spring. She had not dared to tell her husband till she was sure. But she would tell him this evening when they were sitting together over the fire.

She stood motionless in the deepening dusk, trying to be calm. And at last in the far distance she saw a speck arise, as it were, out of a crease in the level earth—her husband on his horse. How many hundreds of times she had seen him appear over the rim of the world, just as he was appearing now! She lit the lamp and put it in the window. She blew the log fire to a blaze. The firelight danced on the wooden walls, crowded with cheap pictures, and on the few precious daguerreotypes that reminded her she too had brothers and sisters and kin of her own, far away in one of those southern cities where the war was still smouldering grimly on.

Her husband took his horse round and stalled him. Presently he came in. They stood a moment together in silence as their custom was, and she leaned her forehead against his shoulder. Then she busied herself with his supper, and he sat down heavily at the little table.

"Had you any difficulty this time in getting the money together?" she asked.

Her husband was a tax collector.

"None," he said abstractedly, "at least—yes—a little. But I have it all, and the arrears as well. It makes a large sum."

He was evidently thinking of something else. She did not speak again. She saw something was troubling him.

"I heard news to-day at Phillip's," he said at last, "which I don't like. If I had heard in time, and if I could have borrowed a fresh horse, I would have ridden straight on to ——. But it was too late in the day to be safe, and you would have been anxious what had become of me if I had been out all night with all this money on me. I shall go to-morrow as soon as it is light."

They discussed the business which took him to the nearest town thirty miles away, where their small savings were invested—somewhat precariously as it turned out. What was safe, who was safe while the invisible war between North and South smouldered on and on? It had not come near them, but as an earthquake which is engulfing cities in one part of Europe will rattle a teacup without oversetting it on a cottage shelf half a continent away—so the Civil War had reached them at last.

"I take a hopeful view," he said, but his face was overcast. "I don't see why we should lose the little we have. It has been hard enough to scrape it together, God knows. Promptitude and joint action with Reynolds will probably save it. But I must be prompt." He still spoke abstractedly, as if even now he were thinking of something else.

He began to take out of the leathern satchel various bags of money.

"Shall I help you to count it?"

She often did so.

They counted the flimsy dirty paper money together, and put it all back into the various labelled bags.

"It comes right," he said.

Suddenly she said, "But you can't pay it into the bank to-morrow if you go to ——"

"I know," he said, looking at her; "that is what I have been thinking of ever since I heard Phillip's news. I don't like leaving you with all this money in the house, but I must."

She was silent. She was not frightened for herself, but it was state money, not their own. She was not nervous as he was, but she had always shared with him a certain dread of those bulging bags, and had always been thankful to see him return safe—he never went twice by the same track—after paying the money in. In those wild days when men went armed with their lives in their hands it was not well to be known to have large sums about you.

He looked at the bags, frowning.

"I am not afraid," she said.

"There is no real need to be," he said after a moment. "When I leave to-morrow morning it will be thought I have gone to pay it in. Still—"

He did not finish his sentence, but she knew what was in his mind: the great loneliness of the prairie. Out in the white night came the short, sharp yap of a wolf.

"I am not afraid," she said again.

"I shall only be gone one night," he said.

"I have often been a night alone."

"I know," he said, "but somehow it's worse leaving you with so much money in the house."

"No one knows it will be there."

"That is true," he said, "except that everyone knows I have been collecting large sums."

"They will think you have gone to pay it in as usual."

"Yes," he said with an effort.

Then he got up, and went to his tool box. She watched him open it, seeing him in a new light, which encompassed him with even greater love. "If I tell him to-night," she thought, "it will make him even more anxious about leaving me. Perhaps he would refuse to go, and he must go. I will not tell him till he comes back."

The resolution not to speak was like taking hold of a piece of iron in frost. She had not known it would hurt so much. A new tremulousness, sweet and strange, passed over her—not cowardice, not fear, not of the heart nor of the mind, but a sort of emotion of the whole being.

"I will not tell him," she said again.

Her husband got out his tools, took up a plank from the floor, and put the money into a hole beneath it, beside their small valuables, such as they were, in a biscuit tin. Then he replaced the plank, screwed it down, and she drew back a small fur mat over the place. He put away the tools and then came and stood in front of her. He was not conscious of her transfiguration, and she dropped her eyes for fear of showing it.

"I shall start early," he said, "as soon as it is light, and I shall be back before sundown the day after to-morrow. I know it is unreasonable, but I shall go easier in my mind if you will promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Not to go out of the house, or to let any one else come in on any pretence whatever, while I am away," he said "Bar everything, and stay inside."

"I sha'n't want to go out."

He made an impatient movement.

"Promise me that come what will you will let no one in during my absence," he said.

"I promise."

"Swear it."

She hesitated.

"Swear it to please me," he said.

"I swear that I will let no one into the house, on any pretext whatever, until you come back," she said, smiling at him.

He sighed and relapsed into his chair, and gave way to the great fatigue that possessed him.

The next morning he started soon after daybreak, but not until he had brought her in sufficient fuel to last several days. There had been more snow in the night, fine snow like salt, but not enough to make traveling difficult. She watched him ride away, and silenced the voice within her which always said as she saw him go, "You will never see him again, you have heard his voice for the last time." Perhaps, after all, the difference between the brave and the cowardly lies in how they deal with that voice. Both hear it. She silenced it instantly. It spoke again more insistently: "You have heard his voice, felt his kiss, for the last time. He will never see the face of his child." She silenced it again, and went about her work.

The day passed as countless other days had passed. She was accustomed to be much alone. She had work to do, enough and to spare, within the little home which was to become a real home, please God, in the spring. The evening fell almost before she expected it. She locked and barred the doors, and closed the shutters of the windows. She made all secure, as she had done many a time before.

And then putting aside her work, she took down the newest of her well-worn books lately sent her from New Orleans and began to read:

Oui, sans doute, tout meurt; ce monde est un grand rêve,
Et le peu de bonheur qui nous vient en chemin,
Nous n'avon pas plus tôt ce roseau dans la main,
Que le vent nous l'enlève.

Que le vent nous l'enlève. She repeated the last words to herself. Ah! no. The wind could not take her happiness out of her hand.

A wandering wind had arisen at nightfall, and it came softly across the snow and tried the doors and windows as with a furtive hand. She could hear it coming as from an

immense distance, passing with a sigh, returning plaintive, homeless, forlorn, to whisper round the house:

J'ai vu sous le soleil tomber bien d'autres choses
Que les feuilles des bois, et l'écume des eaux,
Bien d'autres s'en aller que le parfum des roses
Et le chant des oiseaux.

That wind meant more snow. Involuntarily she laid down her book and listened to it.

How like the sound of the wind was to wandering footsteps, slowly drawing near, creeping round the house. She could almost have fancied that a hand touched the shutters, was even now trying to raise the latch of the door.

A moment of intense silence, in which the wind seemed to hold its breath and listen without, while she listened within, and then a low, distinct knock upon the door.

She did not move.

"It is the wind," she said to herself; but she knew it was not.

The knock came again, low, urgent, not to be denied.

She had become very cold. She had supposed fear was an emotion of the mind. She had not reckoned for this slow paralysis of the body.

She managed to creep to the window and unbar the shutter an inch or two. By pressing her face against the extreme corner of the pane she could just discern in the snow light part of a man's figure, wrapped in a long cloak.

She barred the window once more. She was not surprised. She knew now that she had known it always. She had pretended to herself that the thief would not come; but she was expecting him when he knocked. And he stood there, outside. Presently he would be inside.

He knocked yet again, this time more loudly. What need was there for silence when for miles and miles round there was no ear to hear save that of a chance prairie dog?

She laid hold upon her courage, seeing that it was her only refuge, and went to the door.

"Who is there?" she said through a chink.

A man's voice, low and feeble, replied, "Let me in."

"I cannot let you in."

There was a short silence.

"I pray you let me in," he said again.

"I have told you I cannot. Who are you?"

"I am a soldier, wounded. I'm trying to get back to my friends at ——." He mentioned a settlement about fifty miles north. "I have missed my way, and I can't drag myself any further."

Her heart swung violently between suspicion and compassion.

"I am alone in the house," she said. "My husband is away, and he made me promise not to let anyone in on any pretence whatever during his absence."

"Then I shall die on your doorstep," said the voice. "I can't drag myself any further."

There was another silence.

"It is beginning to snow," he said.

"I know," she said; and he heard the trouble in her voice.

"Open the door and look at me," he said, "and see if I can do you any harm."

She opened the door and stood on the threshold, barring the way. He was leaning against the doorpost with his head against it, as she had often seen her husband lean when he was talking to her on a summer evening. Something in his attitude, so like her husband's, touched her strangely. Supposing he were in need, and pleaded for help in vain!

The man turned his face toward her. It was sunk and hollow, ravaged with pain, an evil-looking face. His right arm was in a sling under his tattered military cloak. He seemed to have made his final effort, and now stood staring dumbly at her.

"My husband will never forgive me," she said with a sort of sob.

He said nothing more. He seemed at the last point of exhaustion. Through the dim white night a few flakes of snow fell upon his harsh, repellent face and on his bandaged arm.

A sudden wave of pity carried all before it.

She beckoned him into the house, and locked and barred the door. She put him in her husband's chair by the fire.

He hardly noticed anything. He seemed stupefied. He sat staring alternately at the fire and at her. When she asked him to what regiment he belonged he did not answer.

She set before him the supper she had prepared for herself, and chafed his hard, emaciated dirty hand till the warmth returned to it. Then he ate, with difficulty at first, then with slow voracity, all she had put before him.

A semblance of life returned gradually to him.

"I was pretty near done up when I knocked," he said several times.

She dressed his wound, which did not appear very deep, wrapped it in fresh bandages, and readjusted his sling. He took it all as a matter of course.

She made up a little bed of rugs and blankets for him in the back kitchen. When she came back to the living room she found he had dragged himself to his feet, and was looking vacantly at a little picture of President Lincoln on the mantel-shelf. She showed him the bed and told him to lie down on it. He obeyed her implicitly, like a child. She left him, and presently heard him cast himself down. A few minutes later she went to the door and listened. His heavy, regular breathing told her he was asleep.

She went back to the kitchen and sat down by the fire.

Was he really asleep? Was it all feigned—the wound, the story, the exhaustion? Had she been trapped? Oh! what had she done? What had she done?

She seemed like two people. One self, silent, alert, experienced, fearless, knew that she had allowed herself to be deluded in spite of being warned, knew that her feelings had been played upon, made use of, not even dexterously made use of; knew that she had disobeyed her husband, broken her solemn oath to him, plunged him with herself into disgrace if the money were stolen. And in the eyes of that self it was already stolen. It was still under the plank beneath her feet, but it was already stolen.

The other self, tremulous, inconsequent, full of irresistible tenderness for suffering and weakness even in its uncouthest garb, said incessantly:

"I could do no less. If I die for it, still I could do no less. Somebody brought him into the world. Some woman

cried for joy and anguish when he was born. He would have died if I had not taken him in. I could do no less."

Through the long hours she sat by the fire, unable to reconcile herself to going upstairs to her own room and to bed.

Once she got up and noiselessly took down her husband's revolver from the mantel-shelf and examined it. He had taken its fellow with him, and apparently contrary to his custom he had taken the powder flask with him too, for it was gone from its nail. The revolvers were always kept loaded, but—by some evil chance the one that remained was unloaded. She could have sworn she had seen her husband load it two days ago. Why was this numbness creeping over her again? She got out powder and bullets from a small store she had of her own, loaded and primed it, and laid it on the table beside her.

The night had become very still. Her hearing seemed to reach out till she felt she could have heard a coyote move in its hole miles away. The log fire creaked and shifted. The tall clock in the corner ticked, catching its chain now and then, as its manner was. The wooden walls shrunk and groaned a little. The small home-like sounds only accentuated the enormous silence without. Suddenly in the midst of them a real sound fell upon her ear; very low but different, not like the fragmentary inadvertent murmur of the hut; a small, purposeful, stealthy sound, aware of itself. She listened as she had listened before, without moving. It was not louder than the whittling of a mouse behind the wainscot, hardly louder than the scraping of a mole's thin hand in the soil. It continued. Then it stopped. It was only her foolish fancy, after all. There it was again. Where did it come from?

The man in the next room?

She took up the lamp and crept down the narrow passage to the door of the back kitchen. His loud, even breathing sounded distinctly through the crannies of the ill-fitting door. Surely it was overloud. She listened to it. She could hear nothing else. Was his breathing a pretence? She opened the door noiselessly, and went in, shading the light with her hand.

She bent over the sleeping man. At the first glance her

heart sank, for he had not taken off his boots. But as she looked hard at him her suspicions died within her. He lay on his back, with his coarse, emaciated face toward her, his mouth open, showing his broken teeth. The sleep of utter exhaustion was upon him. She could have killed him as he lay. He was not acting. He was really asleep.

She crept out of the room again, leaving the door ajar, and went back to the kitchen.

Hardly had she sat down when she heard the sound again. It was too faint to reach her except when she was in the kitchen. She knew now where it came from—*the door.* Some one was picking the lock.

The instant the sleeping man was out of her sight she suspected him again.

Was he really asleep, after all? He had not taken off his boots. When she came back from making his bed she had found him standing by the mantel-shelf. Had he unloaded the pistol in her absence? Would he presently get up, and open the door to his confederates?

Her mind rose clear and cold and unflinching. She took up the pistol, and then laid it down again. She wanted a more noiseless weapon. She got out her husband's great clasp-knife from the open tool box, took the lamp, and crept back to the man's bedside. She should be able to kill him. Certainly she should be able to kill him; and then she should have the pistol for the other one.

But he still slept heavily. When she saw him again, again her suspicions fell from her. She *knew* he was asleep.

She shook him by the shoulder, noiselessly, but with increasing violence, until he opened his eyes with a groan. Then only she remembered that she was shaking his wounded arm. He saw the knife in her hand, and raised his left arm as if to ward off the blow.

"Listen," she whispered, close to his ear. "Don't speak. There is a man trying to break into the house. You must get up and help me."

He stared at her, vaguely at first, but with growing intelligence. The food and sleep had restored him somewhat to himself. He sat up on the couch.

"Take off my boots," he whispered; "I tried and could not."

Her last suspicion of him vanished. She cut the laces with her knife, and dragged his boots off. They stuck to his feet, and bits of the woollen socks came off with them. They had evidently not been taken off for weeks. While she did it he whispered, "Why should any one be wanting to break in? There's nothing here to take."

"Yes, there is," she said. "There's a lot of money."

"Good Lord! Where?"

"Under the floor in the kitchen."

"Then it's the kitchen they'll make for. You bet they know where the money is if they know it's here. Are there many of 'em?"

"I don't know."

"Well, we shall know soon enough," said the man. He had become alert, keen. "Have you any pistols?"

"Yes, one."

"Fetch it, but don't make a sound, mind."

She stole away, and returned with the pistol. She would have put it into his hand, but he pushed it away.

"It's no use to me," he said, "with my arm in a sling. I will see what I can do with my left hand and the knife. Can you shoot?"

"Yes."

"Can you hit anything?"

"Yes."

"To be depended on?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's darned lucky. How long will that door hold?"

They were both in the little passage by now, pressed close together, listening to the furtive pick, pick of some one at the lock.

"I don't think it will hold more than a minute."

"Now, look here," he said, "I shall go and stand at the foot of the stair, and knife the second man, if there is a second. The first man I'll leave to you. There's a bit of light outside from the snow. He'll let in enough light to see him by as he opens the door. Don't wait. Fire at him as he comes in, and don't stop; go on firing at him till he drops. You've got six bullets. Don't you make any mistake and shoot me. I've had enough of that already. Now

you look carefully where I'm going to stand, and when I'm there you put out the lamp."

He spoke to her as a man does to his comrade.

That she could be frightened did not seem to enter his calculations. He moved with catlike stealth to the foot of the tiny staircase and flattened himself against the wall. Then he stretched his left arm once or twice as if to make sure of it, licked the haft of the knife, and nodded at her.

She instantly put out the lamp.

All was dark save for a faint thread of light which outlined the door. Across the thread something moved once—twice. The sound of picking ceased. Then another sound succeeded it, a new one, unlike the last, as if something were being gently prised open, wrenched.

"The bar will hold," she said to herself, and then remembered for the first time that the rung into which the bar slid had been loose these many days. It was giving now.

It had given!

The door opened silently, and a man came in.

For a moment she saw him clear, with the accomplice snow-light behind him. She did not hesitate. She shot once and again. He fell and struggled violently up, and she shot again. He fell and dragged himself to his knees, and she shot again. Then he sank gently and slowly down as if tired, with his face against the wall, and moved no more.

The man on the stairs rushed out and looked through the open door.

"By G—, he was single-handed!" he said.

Then he stooped over the prostrate man and turned him over on his back.

"Dead!" he said, chuckling. "Well done, Missus!—stone dead!"

He was masked.

The dirty left hand tore the mask callously off the gray face.

The woman had drawn near and looked over his shoulder.

"Do you know him?" said the man.

For a moment she did not answer, and the pistol which had done its work so well dropped noisily out of her palsied hand.

"He is a stranger to me," she said, looking fixedly at her husband's fading face.

The Stories of the Three Burglars

FRANK R. STOCKTON

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I AM a householder in a pleasant country neighborhood, about twenty miles from New York. My family consists of myself and wife, our boy, George William, aged two, two maid-servants, and a man; but in the summer we have frequent visitors, and at the time of which I am about to write my Aunt Martha was staying with us.

My house is large and pleasant, and we have neighbors near enough for social purposes and yet not too near or too many to detract from the rural aspect of our surroundings. But we do not live in a paradise; we are occasionally troubled by mosquitoes and burglars.

Against the first of these annoyances we have always been able to guard ourselves, at least in a measure, and our man and the cook declare that they have become so used to them that they do not mind them; but to guard against burglars is much more difficult, and to become used to them would, I think, require a great deal of practice.

For several months before the period of this narrative our neighborhood had been subject to visits from burglars. From time to time houses had been entered and robbed, and the offenders had never been detected.

We had no police force, not even a village organization. There was a small railway station near our house, and six miles away was the county town. For fire and police protection each household was obliged to depend upon itself.

Before the beginning of the burglarious enterprises in our midst, we had not felt the need of much protection in this direction; sometimes poultry was stolen, but this was a rare occurrence, and, although windows and doors were generally

fastened for the night, this labor was often considered much more troublesome than necessary. But now a great change had taken place in the feelings of our community. When the first robbery occurred the neighbors were inclined to laugh about it, and to say that Captain Hubbard's habit of sitting up after the rest of his family had gone to bed and then retiring and forgetting to close the front door had invited the entrance of a passing tramp. But when a second and a third house, where windows and doors had not been left open, had been entered, and, in a measure, despoiled, people ceased to laugh; and if there had been any merriment at all on the subject, it would have been caused by the extraordinary and remarkable precautions taken against the entrance of thieves by night. The loaded pistol became the favorite companion of the head of the house; those who had no watch-dogs bought them; there were new locks, new bolts, new fastenings. At one time there was a mounted patrol of young men, which, however, was soon broken up by their mothers. But this trouble was unavailing, for at intervals the burglaries continued.

As a matter of course a great many theories were broached as to the reasons for this disturbance in our hitherto peaceful neighborhood. We were at such a distance from the ordinary centers of crime that it was generally considered that professional burglars would hardly take the trouble to get to us or to get away from us, and that, therefore, the offenses were probably committed by unsuspected persons living in this part of the country who had easy means of determining which houses were worth breaking into and what method of entrance would be most feasible. In this way some families, hitherto regarded as respectable families, had fallen under suspicion.

So far, mine was the only house of any importance within the distance of a mile from the station which had not in some way suffered from burglars. In one or two of these cases the offenders had been frightened away before they had done any other injury than the breaking of a window-shutter; but we had been spared any visitation whatever. After a time we began to consider that this was an invidious distinction. Of course we did not desire that robbers should

break into our house and steal, but it was a sort of implied insult that robbers should think that our house was not worth breaking into. We contrived, however, to bear up under this implied contempt and even under the facetious imputations of some of our lively neighbors, who declared that it looked very suspicious that we should lose nothing, and even continue to add to our worldly goods, while everybody else was suffering from abstractions.

I did not, however, allow any relaxation in my vigilance in the protection of my house and family. My time to suffer had not yet arrived, and it might not arrive at all; but if it did come it should not be my fault. I therefore carefully examined all the new precautions my neighbors had taken against the entrance of thieves, and where I approved of them I adopted them.

Of some of these my wife and I did not approve. For instance, a tin pan containing iron spoons, the dinner bell, and a miscellaneous collection of hardware balanced on the top stair of the staircase, and so connected with fine cords that a thief coming up the stairs would send it rattling and bounding to the bottom, was looked upon by us with great disfavor. The descent of the pan, whether by innocent accident or the approach of a burglar, might throw our little boy into a fit, to say nothing of the terrible fright it would give my Aunt Martha, who was a maiden lady of middle age, and not accustomed to a clatter in the night. A bull-dog in the house my wife would not have, nor, indeed, a dog of any kind. George William was not yet old enough to play with dogs, especially a sharp one; and if the dog was not sharp it was of no use to have him in the house. To the ordinary burglar-alarm she strongly objected. She had been in houses where these things went off of their own accord, occasioning great consternation; and, besides, she said that if thieves got into the house she did not want to know it and she did not want me to know it; the quicker they found what they came for and went away with it the better. Of course, she wished them kept out, if such a thing were possible; but if they did get in, our duty as parents of the dearest little boy was non-interference. She insisted, however, that the room in which the loveliest of children slept, and which was also

occupied by ourselves, should be made absolutely burglar proof; and this object, by means of extraordinary bolts and chains, I flattered myself I accomplished. My Aunt Martha had a patent contrivance for fastening a door that she always used, whether at home or traveling, and in whose merit she placed implicit confidence. Therefore we did not feel it necessary to be anxious about her; and the servants slept at the top of the house, where thieves would not be likely to go.

"They may continue to slight us by their absence," said my wife, "but I do not believe that they will be able to frighten us by their presence."

I was not, however, so easily contented as my wife. Of course I wished to do everything possible to protect George William and the rest of the family, but I was also very anxious to protect our property in all parts of the house. Therefore, in addition to everything else I had done, I devised a scheme for interfering with the plans of men who should feloniously break into our home.

After a consultation with a friend, who was a physician greatly interested in the study of narcotic drugs, I procured a mixture which was almost tasteless and without peculiar odor, and of which a small quantity would in less than a minute throw an ordinary man into a state of unconsciousness. The potion was, however, no more dangerous in its effects than that quantity of ardent spirits which would cause entire insensibility. After the lapse of several hours, the person under the influence of the drug would recover consciousness without assistance. But in order to provide against all contingencies my friend prepared a powerful antidote, which would almost immediately revive one who had been made unconscious by our potion.

The scheme that I had devised may possibly have been put into use by others. But of this I know not. I thought it a good scheme and determined to experiment with it, and, if possible, to make a trap which should catch a burglar. I would reveal this plan to no one but my friend the physician and my wife. Secrecy would be an important element in its success.

Our library was a large and pleasant room on the ground floor of the house, and here I set my trap. It was my habit

to remain in this room an hour or so after the rest of the family had gone to bed, and, as I was an early riser, I was always in it again before it was necessary for a servant to enter in the morning.

Before leaving the library for the night I placed in a conspicuous position in the room a small table, on which was a tray holding two decanters partially filled with wine, in the one red and in the other white. There was also upon the tray an open box of biscuit and three wine-glasses, two of them with a little wine at the bottom. I took pains to make it appear that these refreshments had been recently partaken of. There were biscuit crumbs upon the tray, and a drop or two of wine was freshly spilled upon it every time the trap was set. The table, thus arranged, was left in the room during the night, and early in the morning I put the tray and its contents into a closet and locked it up.

A portion of my narcotic preparation was thoroughly mixed with the contents of each of the decanters in such proportions that a glass of the wine would be sufficient to produce the desired effect.

It was my opinion that there were few men who, after a night walk and perhaps some labor in forcibly opening a door or a window-shutter, would not cease for a moment in pursuance of their self-imposed task to partake of the refreshments so conveniently left behind them by the occupants of the house when they retired to rest. Should my surmises be correct, I might reasonably expect, should my house be broken into, to find an unconscious burglar in the library when I went down in the morning. And I was sure, and my wife agreed with me, that if I should find a burglar in that room or any other part of the house, it was highly desirable that he should be an unconscious one.

Night after night I set my burglar trap, and morning after morning I locked it up in the closet. I cannot say that I was exactly disappointed that no opportunity offered to test the value of my plan, but it did seem a pity that I should take so much trouble for nothing. It had been some weeks since any burglaries had been committed in the neighborhood, and it was the general opinion that the miscreants had considered this field worked out and had transferred their

labors to a better-paying place. The insult of having been considered unworthy the attention of the knights of the midnight jimmy remained with us, but as all our goods and chattels also remained with us we could afford to brook the indignity.

As the trap cost nothing my wife did not object to my setting it every night for the present. Something might happen, she remarked, and it was just as well to be prepared in more ways than one; but there was a point upon which she was very positive.

"When George William is old enough to go about the house by himself," she said, "those decanters must not be left exposed upon the table. Of course I do not expect him to go about the house drinking wine and everything that he finds, but there is no knowing what a child in the first moments of his investigative existence may do."

For myself, I became somewhat tired of acting my part in this little farce every night and morning, but when I have undertaken anything of this sort I am slow to drop it.

It was about three weeks since I had begun to set my trap when I was awakened in the night by a sudden noise. I sat up in bed, and as I did so my wife said to me sleepily—

"What is that? Was it thunder? There it is again!" she exclaimed, starting up. "What a crash! It must have struck somewhere." I did not answer. It was not thunder. It was something in the house, and it flashed into my mind that perhaps my trap had been sprung. I got out of bed and began rapidly to dress.

"What are you going to do?" anxiously asked my wife.

"I'm going to see what has happened," said I. At that moment there was another noise. This was like two or three heavy footsteps, followed by a sudden thump; but it was not so loud as the others.

"John," cried my wife, "don't stir an inch, it's burglars!" and she sprang out of bed and seized me by the arm.

"I must go down," I said; "but there is really no reason for your being frightened. I shall call David, and shall carry my pistol, so there is really no danger. If there are thieves in the house they have probably decamped by this time—

that is, if they are able to do so, for of course they must know that noise would awaken the soundest sleepers."

My wife looked at me and then slowly withdrew her hands from my arm.

"You promise me," she said, "if you find a burglar downstairs in the possession of his senses you will immediately come back to me and George William?"

I promised her, and, slipping on some clothes, I went out into the second-story hall. I carried no light. Before I had reached the bottom of the back stairs I heard David, my man, coming down. To be sure it was he and not a burglar I spoke to him in a low voice, my pistol raised in case of an unsatisfactory reply.

"I heard that noise, sir," he whispered, "and was going down to see about it."

"Are you ready if it's thieves?" I whispered.

"I have got the biscuit-beater," he replied.

"Come on, then," said I, and we went downstairs.

I had left no light in the library, but there was one there now, and it shone through the open door into the hallway. We stopped and listened. There was no sound, and then slowly and cautiously we approached the door of the library. The scene I beheld astounded me, and involuntarily I sprang back a step or two. So did David; but in an instant we saw that there was no need of retreat or defense. Stretched upon the floor, not far from the doorway, lay a tall man, his face upturned to the light of a bull's-eye lantern which stood by the mantel-piece. His eyes were shut, and it was evident that he was perfectly insensible. Near by, in the wreck of the small table, glasses, and decanters, lay another man, apparently of heavier build. He also was as still as a corpse. A little further back, half sitting on the floor, with the upper part of his body resting against the lounge, was another man with a black mask over his face.

"Are they dead?" exclaimed David, in an undertone of horror.

"No," said I, "they are not dead; they have been caught in my trap."

And I must admit that the consciousness of this created a proud exultation of spirit within me. I had overmatched

these rascals; they were prostrated before me. If one of them moved, David and I could kill him. But I did not believe there would be any killing, nor any moving for the present.

In a high whisper, which could have been heard distinctly all over the house, my wife now called to me from the top of the stairs. "What is it?" she said. "What has happened?"

I stepped quickly to the stairway.

"Everything is all right," I said in a loud, distinct voice, intended to assure my wife that there was no necessity for caution or alarm. "I will be with you presently."

"I am glad to hear that nothing is the matter," said Aunt Martha, now for the first time opening her door. "I was afraid something had happened."

But I had business to attend to before I could go upstairs. In thinking over and arranging this plan for the capture of burglars, I had carefully considered its various processes, and had provided against all the contingencies I could think of; therefore I was not now obliged to deliberate what I should do. "Keep your eye on them," said I to David, "and if one of them moves be ready for him. The first thing to do is to tie them hand and foot."

I quickly lighted a lamp, and then took from another shelf of the closet a large coil of strong cotton rope, which I had provided for such an occasion as the present.

"Now," said I to David, "I will tie them while you stand by to knock over any one of them who attempts to get up."

The instrument with which David was prepared to carry out my orders was a formidable one. In the days of my youth my family was very fond of "Maryland biscuit," which owes much of its delicacy to the fact that before baking it is pounded and beaten by a piece of heavy iron. Some people used one kind of a beater and some another, but we had had made for the purpose a heavy iron club a little over a foot long, large and heavy at one end and a handle at the other. In my present household Maryland biscuits were never made, but I had preserved this iron beater as a memento of my boyhood, and when the burglaries began in our vicinity I gave it to David to keep in his room, to be used as a weapon if necessary. I did not allow him to have a pistol, having a regard for my own safety in a sudden night alarm,

and nothing could be more formidable in a hand-to-hand encounter than this skull-crushing club.

I began with the tall man, and rapidly tied his feet together with many twists of the rope and as many knots. I then turned him over and tied his elbows behind him in the same secure way. I had given so much thought to the best method of securing a man by cords, that I do not think this fellow could possibly have released himself when I had finished with him.

David was obeying my orders and keeping a strict watch on the prostrate men; but his emotions of amazement were so great that he could not keep them down.

"What is the matter with them, sir?" he said. "How did they come so?"

"There is no time for talking now," I answered. "I will tell you all about it when the men have been secured." I now turned my attention to the man who was partly resting against the lounge. I first tied his feet, and before letting him down to the floor, so as to get to his arms, I removed his hat and his mask, which was made of black muslin. I was surprised to see the beardless face of a young and very good-looking man. He was well dressed, and had the general appearance of a person belonging to theatrical circles. When his arms had been tied, I told David he might lay down his biscuit-beater, and help me with the third man, who was badly mixed up with the *débris* of the refreshments. We hauled him out and tied him up. He was rather a short man, but very heavy, and I could see no signs of his having been hurt by the smash-up he made in falling.

We now proceeded to search the insensible burglars for arms. Upon the tall man we found a large revolver, a heavy billy, which seemed as if it had seen service, and a long-bladed knife. The stout man carried two double-barrelled pistols, and upon one of the fingers of his right hand wore a brass ring with a murderous-looking iron protuberance upon it, which, when driven forward by his powerful arm, was probably more dangerous than a billy. Upon the younger man we found no arms at all, and his hip pocket contained nothing but a small handbook on civil engineering.

I now briefly explained to David the nature of the trap

which had caught the burglars. He gazed upon me with a face glowing with amazed admiration.

"What a head you have got, sir!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe there is another man in this State who would have thought of that. And what are you going to do with them now, sir; hang 'em? That's what ought to be done with them, the hounds!"

"All I shall do," I answered, "will be to keep them till daylight, and then I shall send word to the sheriff at Kennertown, and have him send officers for them."

"Upon my word," exclaimed David, "they are in the worst kind of a box."

Now my wife called me again. "What in the world are you doing down there?" she called; "why don't you come upstairs?"

This annoyed me, for I was not yet ready to go upstairs. I wished to resuscitate these fellows, for their stupor was so profound that I began to fear that perhaps they had taken too much of the drug and ought to be brought to their senses as speedily as possible. This feeling was due more to my desire that serious injuries should not occur to the rascals while in my house than to any concern for them.

"My dear," said I, stepping to the bottom of the stairs, "I have some things to attend to down here which will occupy me a few minutes longer; then I will come up to you."

"I can't imagine what the things are," she said, "but I suppose I can wait," and she went into her room and closed her door after her.

I now began to consider what was to be done with the burglars after they had been resuscitated. My first impulse was to rid the house of them by carrying them out of doors and bringing them to their senses there. But there was an objection to this plan. They would be pretty heavy fellows to carry, and as it would be absolutely necessary to watch them until they could be given into the charge of the officers of the law, I did not want to stay out of doors to do this, for the night air was raw and chilly, and I therefore determined to keep them in the house. And as they could be resuscitated better in a sitting position, they must be set up in some way or other. I consulted David on the subject.

"You might put 'em up with their backs agin the wall, sir," said he, "but the dirty beasts would spoil the paper. I wouldn't keep them in a decent room like this. I'd haul 'em out into the kitchen, anyway."

But as they were already in the library I decided to let them stay there, and to get them as speedily as possible into some position in which they might remain. I bethought me of a heavy wooden settle or bench with back and arms which stood on the side piazza. With David's help I brought this into the room and placed it with its back to the window.

"Now, then," said I to David, "we will put them on this bench, and I will tie them fast to it. We cannot be too careful in securing them, for if one of them were to get loose, even without arms, there is no knowing what trouble he might make."

"Well, sir," said David, " if I'm to handle them at all, I'd rather have been dead, as I hope they are, than have them alive; but you needn't be afraid, sir, that any one of them will get loose. If I see any signs of that I'll crack the rascal's skull in a jiffy."

It required a great deal of tugging and lifting to get those three men on the bench, but we got them there side by side, their heads hanging listlessly, some one way, some another. I then tied each one of them firmly to the bench.

I had scarcely finished this when I again heard my wife's voice from the top of the stairs.

"If any pipes have burst," she called down, "tell David not to catch the water in the new milk-pans."

"Very well," I replied, "I'll see to it," and was rejoiced to hear again the shutting of the bedroom door.

I now saturated a sponge with the powerful preparation which Dr. Marks had prepared as an antidote, and held it under the nose of the tall burglar. In less than twenty seconds he made a slight quivering in his face as if he were about to sneeze, and very soon he did sneeze slightly. Then he sneezed violently, raised his head, and opened his eyes. For a moment he gazed blankly before him, and then looked stupidly at David and at me. But in an instant there flashed into his face the look of a wild beast. His quick, glittering eye took in the whole situation at a glance. With

a furious oath he threw himself forward with such a powerful movement that he nearly lifted the bench.

"Stop that," said David, who stood near him with his iron club uplifted. "If you do that again I'll let you feel this."

The man looked at him with a fiery flash in his eyes, and then he looked at me, as I stood holding the muzzle of my pistol within two feet of his face. The black and red faded out of his countenance. He became pale. He glanced at his companions bound and helpless. His expression now changed entirely. The fury of the wild beast was succeeded by a look of frightened subjection. Gazing very anxiously at my pistol, he said, in a voice which, though agitated, was low and respectful:

"What does this mean? What are you going to do? Will you please turn away the muzzle of that pistol?"

I took no notice of this indication of my steadiness of hand, and answered:

"I am going to bring these other scoundrels to their senses, and early in the morning the three of you will be on your way to jail, where I hope you may remain for the rest of your lives."

"If you don't get killed on your way there," said David, in whose nervous hand the heavy biscuit-beater was almost as dangerous as my pistol.

The stout man who sat in the middle of the bench was twice as long in reviving as had been his companion, who watched the operation with intense interest. When the burly scoundrel finally became conscious, he sat for a few minutes gazing at the floor with a silly grin; then he raised his head and looked first at one of his companions and then at the other, gazed for an instant at me and David, tried to move his feet, gave a pull at one arm and then at the other, and when he found he was bound hard and fast, his face turned as red as fire and he opened his mouth, whether to swear or yell I know not. I had already closed the door, and before the man had uttered more than a premonitory sound, David had clapped the end of his bludgeon against his mouth.

"Taste that," he said, "and you know what you will get

if you disturb this family with any of your vile cursin' and swearin'."

"Look here," said the tall man, suddenly turning to the other with an air of authority, "keep your mouth shut and don't speak till you're spoken to. Mind that, now, or these gentlemen will make it the worse for you."

David grinned as he took away his club.

"I'd gentlemen you," he said, "if I could get half a chance to do it."

The face of the heavy burglar maintained its redness, but he kept his mouth shut.

When the younger man was restored to his senses, his full consciousness and power of perception seemed to come to him in an instant. His eyes flashed from right to left, he turned deadly white, and then merely moving his arms and legs enough to make himself aware that he was bound, he sat perfectly still and said not a word.

I now felt that I must go and acquaint my wife with what had happened, or otherwise she would be coming downstairs to see what was keeping me so long. David declared that he was perfectly able to keep guard over them, and I ran upstairs. David afterward told me that as soon as I left the room the tall burglar endeavored to bribe him to cut their ropes, and told him if he was afraid to stay behind after doing this he would get him a much better situation than this could possibly be. But as David threatened personal injury to the speaker if he uttered another word of the kind, the tall man said no more; but the stout man became very violent and angry, threatening all sorts of vengeance on my unfortunate man. David said he was beginning to get angry, when the tall man, who seemed to have much influence over the other fellow, ordered him to keep quiet, as the gentleman with the iron club no doubt thought he was doing right. The young fellow never said a word.

When I told my wife that I had caught three burglars, and they were fast bound in the library, she nearly fainted; and when I had revived her she begged me to promise that I would not go downstairs again until the police had carried away the horrible wretches. But I assured her that it was absolutely necessary for me to return to the library. She

then declared that she would go with me, and if anything happened she would share my fate. "Besides," she said, "if they are tied fast so they can't move, I should like to see what they look like. I never saw a burglar."

I did not wish my wife to go downstairs, but as I knew there would be no use in objecting, I consented. She hastily dressed herself, making me wait for her; and when she left the room she locked the door on the sleeping George William, in order that no one should get at him during her absence. As we passed the head of the stairs, the door of my Aunt Martha's room opened, and there she stood, completely dressed, with her bonnet on, and a little leather bag in her hand.

"I heard so much talking and so much going up and down stairs that I thought I had better be ready to do whatever had to be done. Is it fire?"

"No," said my wife; "it's three burglars tied in a bunch in the library. I am going down to see them."

My Aunt Martha gasped, and looked as if she were going to sit down on the floor.

"Goodness gracious!" she said, "if you're going I'll go too. I can't let you go alone, and I never did see a burglar."

I hurried down and left the two ladies on the stairs until I was sure everything was still safe; and when I saw that there had been no change in the state of affairs, I told them to come down.

When my wife and Aunt Martha timidly looked in at the library door, the effect upon them and the burglars was equally interesting. The ladies each gave a start and a little scream, and huddled themselves close to me, and the three burglars gazed at them with faces that expressed more astonishment than any I had ever seen before. The stout fellow gave vent to a smothered exclamation, and the face of the young man flushed, but not one of them spoke.

"Are you sure they are tied fast?" whispered my Aunt Martha to me.

"Perfectly," I answered; "if I had not been sure I should not have allowed you to come down."

Thereupon the ladies picked up courage and stepped further into the room.

"Did you and David catch them?" asked my aunt; "and how in the world did you do it?"

"I'll tell you all about that another time," I said, "and you had better go upstairs as soon as you two have seen what sort of people are these cowardly burglars who sneak or break into the houses of respectable people at night, and rob and steal and ruin other people's property with no more conscience or human feeling than is possessed by the rats which steal your corn, or the polecats which kill your chickens."

"I can scarcely believe," said Aunt Martha, "that that young man is a real burglar."

At these words the eyes of the fellow spoken of glowed as he fixed them on Aunt Martha, but he did not say a word, and the paleness which had returned to his face did not change.

"Have they told you who they are?" asked my wife.

"I haven't asked them," I said. "And now don't you think you had better go upstairs?"

"It seems to me," said Aunt Martha, "that those ropes must hurt them."

The tall man now spoke. "Indeed they do, madam," he said in a low voice and very respectful manner, "they are very tight."

I told David to look at all the cords and see if any of them were too tightly drawn.

"It's all nonsense, sir," said he, when he had finished the examination; "not one of the ropes is a bit too tight. All they want is a chance to pull out their ugly hands."

"Of course," said Aunt Martha, "if it would be unsafe to loosen the knots I wouldn't do it. Are they to be sent to prison?"

"Yes," said I; "as soon as the day breaks I shall send down for the police."

I now heard a slight sound at the door, and turning, saw Alice, our maid of the house, who was peeping in at the door. Alice was a modest girl, and quite pretty.

"I heard the noise and the talking, sir," she said, "and when I found the ladies had gone down to see what it was, I thought I would come too."

"And where is the cook," asked my wife; "don't she want to see burglars?"

"Not a bit of it," answered Alice, very emphatically. "As soon as I told her what it was she covered up her head with the bedclothes and declared, ma'am, that she would never get up until they were entirely gone out of the house."

At this the stout man grinned.

"I wish you'd all cover up your heads," he said. The tall man looked at him severely, and he said no more.

David did not move from his post near the three burglars, but he turned toward Alice and looked at her. We knew that he had tender feelings toward the girl, and I think that he did not approve of her being there.

"Have they stolen anything?" asked Aunt Martha.

"They have not had any chance to take anything away," I said; and my wife remarked that whether they had stolen anything or not, they had made a dreadful mess on the floor, and had broken the table. They should certainly be punished.

At this she made a motion as if she would leave the room, and an anxious expression immediately came on the face of the tall man, who had evidently been revolving something in his mind.

"Madam," he said, "we are very sorry that we have broken your table, and that we have damaged some of your glass and your carpet. I assure you, however, that nothing of the kind would have happened but for that drugged wine, which was doubtless intended for a medicine, and not a beverage; but weary and chilled as we were when we arrived, madam, we were glad to partake of it, supposing it ordinary wine."

I could not help showing a little pride at the success of my scheme.

"The refreshment was intended for fellows of your class, and I am very glad you accepted it."

The tall man did not answer me, but he again addressed my wife.

"Madam," he said, "if you ladies would remain and listen to me a few moments, I am sure I would make you aware that there is much to extenuate the apparent offense which I have committed to-night."

My wife did not answer him, but turning to me said, smiling, "If he alludes to their drinking your wine he need not apologize."

The man looked at her with an expression as if her words had pained him.

"Madam," he said, "if you consent to listen to my explanations and the story of this affair, I am sure your feelings toward me would not be so harsh."

"Now, then," said my Aunt Martha, "if he has a story to tell he ought to be allowed to tell it, even in a case like this. Nobody should be judged until he has said what he thinks he ought to say. Let us hear his story."

I laughed. "Any statement he may make," I said, "will probably deserve a much stronger name than stories."

"I think that what you say is true," remarked my wife; "but still if he has a story to tell I should like to hear it."

I think I heard David give a little grunt; but he was too well bred to say anything.

"Very well," said I, "if you choose to sit up and hear him talk, it is your affair. I shall be obliged to remain here anyway, and will not object to anything that will help to pass away the time. But these men must not be the only ones who are seated. David, you and Alice can clear away that broken table and the rest of the stuff, and then we might as well sit down and make ourselves comfortable."

Alice, with cloth and brush, approached very timidly the scene of the disaster; but the younger burglar, who was nearest to her, gazed upon her with such a gentle and quiet air that she did not seem to be frightened. When she and David had put the room in fair order, I placed two easy-chairs for my wife and Aunt Martha at a moderate distance from the burglars, and took another myself a little nearer to them, and then told David to seat himself near the other end of the bench, and Alice took a chair at a little distance from the ladies.

"Now, then," said Aunt Martha to the burglars, "I would like very much to hear what any one of you can say in extenuation of having broken into a gentleman's house by night."

Without hesitation the tall man began his speech. He had

a long and rather lean, close-shaven face, which at present bore the expression of an undertaker conducting a funeral. Although it was my aunt who had shown the greatest desire to hear his story, he addressed himself to my wife. I think he imagined that she was the more influential person of the two.

"Madam," said he, "I am glad of the opportunity of giving you and your family an idea of the difficulties and miseries which beset a large class of your fellow-beings of whom you seldom have any chance of knowing anything at all, but of whom you hear all sorts of the most misleading accounts. Now, I am a poor man. I have suffered the greatest miseries that poverty can inflict. I am here, suspected of having committed a crime. It is possible that I may be put to considerable difficulty and expense in proving my innocence."

"I shouldn't wonder," I interrupted. To this remark he paid no attention.

"Considering all this," he continued, "you may not suppose, madam, that as a boy I was brought up most respectably and properly. My mother was a religious woman, and my father was a boat-builder. I was sent to school, and my mother has often told me that I was a good scholar. But she died when I was about sixteen, and I am sure had this not happened I should never have been even suspected of breaking the laws of my country. Not long after her death my father appeared to lose interest in his business, and took to rowing about the river instead of building boats for other people to row. Very often he went out at night, and I used to wonder why he should care to be on the water in the darkness, and sometimes in the rain. One evening at supper he said to me: 'Thomas, you ought to know how to row in the dark as well as in the daytime. I am going up the river to-night, and you can come with me.'

"It was about my ordinary bedtime when we took a boat with two pair of oars, and we pulled up the river about three miles above the city."

"What city?" I asked.

"The city where I was born, sir," he said, "and the name of which I must be excused from mentioning for reasons connected with my only surviving parent. There were houses

on the river bank, but they were not very near each other. Some of them had lights in them, but most of them were dark, as it must have been after eleven o'clock. Before one of them my father stopped rowing for a moment and looked at it pretty hard. It seemed to be all dark, but as we pulled on a little I saw a light in the back of the house.

"My father said nothing, but we kept on, though pulling very easy for a mile or two, and then we turned and floated down with the tide. 'You might as well rest, Thomas,' said he, 'for you have worked pretty hard.'

"We floated slowly, for the tide was just beginning to turn, and when we got near the house which I mentioned, I noticed that there was no light in it. When we were about opposite to it father suddenly looked up and said, not speaking very loud, 'By George! if that isn't Williamson Green's house. I wasn't thinking of it when we rowed up, and passed it without taking notice of it. I am sorry for that, for I wanted to see Williamson, and now I expect he has gone to bed.'

"'Who is Mr. Green?' I asked.

"'He is an old friend of mine,' said my father, 'and I haven't seen him for some little while now. About four months ago he borrowed of me a sextant, quadrant, and chronometer. They were instruments I took from old Captain Barney in payment of some work I did for him. I wasn't usin' them, and Williamson had bought a catboat and was studying navigation; but he has given up that fad now and has promised me over and over to send me back my instruments, but he has never done it. If I'd thought of it I would have stopped and got 'em of him; but I didn't think, and now I expect he has gone to bed. However, I'll row in shore and see; perhaps he's up yet.'

"You see, ma'am," said the speaker to my wife, "I'm tellin' you all these particulars because I am very anxious you should understand exactly how everything happened on this night, which was the turning-point of my life."

"Very good," said Aunt Martha; "we want to hear all the particulars."

"Well, then," continued the burglar, "we pulled up to a stone wall which was at the bottom of Green's place and made fast, and father he got out and went up to the house.

After a good while he came back and said that he was pretty sure Williamson Green had gone to bed, and as it wouldn't do to waken people up from their sleep to ask them for nautical instruments they had borrowed, he sat down for a minute on the top of the wall, and then he slapped his knee, not making much noise, though.

"'By George!' he said, 'an idea has just struck me. I can play the prettiest trick on Williamson that ever was played on mortal man. Those instruments are all in a box locked up, and I know just where he keeps it. I saw it not long ago, when I went to his house to talk about a yacht he wants built. They are on a table in the corner of his bedroom. He was taking me through the house to show me the improvements he had made, and he said to me:

"' "Martin, there's your instruments. I won't trouble you to take them with you, because they're heavy and you're not going straight home, but I'll bring them to you day after tomorrow, when I shall be goin' your way."

"'Now, then,' said my father, 'the trick I'm thinkin' of playing on Williamson is this: I'd like to take that box of instruments out of his room without his knowing it and carry them home, having the boat here convenient; and then in a day or two to write to him and tell him I must have 'em, because I have a special use for 'em. Of course he'll be awfully cut up, not having them to send back; and when he comes down to my place to talk about it, and after hearing all he has to say, I'll show him the box. He'll be the most dumbfoundedest man in this State; and if I don't choose to tell him he'll never know to his dying day how I got that box. And if he lies awake at night, trying to think how I got it, it will serve him right for keeping my property from me so long.'

"'But, father,' said I, 'if the people have gone to bed you can't get into the house to play him your trick.'

"'That can be managed,' says he; 'I'm rather old for climbing myself, but I know a way by which you, Thomas can get in easy enough. At the back of the house is a trellis with a grape-vine running over it, and the top of it is just under one of the second-story windows. You can climb up that trellis, Thomas, and lift up that window-sash very carefully, so's not to make no noise, and get in. Then you'll be

in a back room, with a door right in front of you which opens into Mr. and Mrs. Green's bedroom. There's always a little night lamp burning in it, by which you can see to get about. In the corner, on your right as you go into the room, is a table with my instrument-box standing on it. The box is pretty heavy, and there is a handle on top to carry it by. You needn't be afraid to go in, for by this time they are both sound asleep, and you can pick up the box and walk out as gingerly as a cat, having of course taken your shoes off before you went in. Then you can hand the box out the back window to me—I can climb up high enough to reach it—and you can scuttle down, and we'll be off, having the best rig on Williamson Green that I ever heard of in my born days.'

"I was a very active boy, used to climbing and all that sort of thing, and I had no doubt that I could easily get into the house; but I did not fancy my father's scheme.

"'Suppose,' I said, 'that Mr. Williamson Green should wake up and see me; what could I say? How could I explain my situation?'

"'You needn't say anything,' said my father. 'If he wakes up blow out the light and scoot. If you happen to have the box in your hand drop it out the back window and then slip down after it. He won't see us; but if he does he cannot catch us before we get to the boat; but if he should, however, I'll have to explain the matter to him, and the joke will be against me; but I shall get my instruments, which is the main point, after all.'

"I did not argue with my father, for he was a man who hated to be differed with, and I agreed to help him carry out his little joke. We took off our shoes and walked quietly to the back of the house. My father stood below, and I climbed up the trellis under the back window, which he pointed out. The window-sash was down all but a little crack to let in air, and I raised it so slowly and gently that I made no noise. Then without any trouble at all I got into the room.

"I found myself in a moderate-sized chamber, into which a faint light came from a door opposite the window. Having been several hours out in the night my eyes had become so accustomed to darkness that this light was comparatively strong and I could see everything.

"Looking about me my eyes fell on a little bedstead, on which lay one of the most beautiful infants I ever beheld in my life. Its golden hair lay in ringlets upon the pillow. Its eyes were closed, but its soft cheeks had in them a rosy tinge which almost equalled the color of its dainty little lips, slightly opened as it softly breathed and dreamed." At this point I saw my wife look quickly at the bedroom key she had in her hand. I knew she was thinking of George William.

"I stood entranced," continued the burglar, "gazing upon this babe, for I was very fond of children; but I remembered that I must not waste time, and stepped softly into the next room. There I beheld Mr. and Mrs. Williamson Green in bed, both fast asleep, the gentleman breathing a little hard. In a corner, just where my father told me I should find it, stood the box upon the table.

"But I could not immediately pick it up and depart. The beautiful room in which I found myself was a revelation to me. Until that moment I had not known that I had tastes and sympathies of a higher order than might have been expected of the youthful son of a boat-builder. Those artistic furnishings aroused within a love of the beautiful which I did not know I possessed. The carpets, the walls, the pictures, the hangings in the windows, the furniture, the ornaments—everything, in fact, impressed me with such a delight that I did not wish to move or go away.

"Into my young soul there came a longing. 'Oh!' I said to myself, 'that my parents had belonged to the same social grade as that worthy couple reposing in that bed; and oh! that I, in my infancy, had been as beautiful and as likely to be so carefully nurtured and cultured as that sweet babe in the next room.' I almost heaved a sigh as I thought of the difference between these surroundings and my own, but I checked myself; it would not do to make a noise and spoil my father's joke.

"There were a great many things in that luxurious apartment which it would have delighted me to look upon and examine, but I forebore.

"I wish I'd been there," said the stout man; "there wouldn't have been any forbearin'."

The speaker turned sharply upon him.

"Don't you interrupt me again," he said angrily. Then, instantly resuming his deferential tone, he continued the story.

"But I had come there by the command of my parent, and this command must be obeyed without trifling or loss of time. My father did not approve of trifling or loss of time. I moved quietly toward the table in the corner, on which stood my father's box. I was just about to put my hand upon it when I heard a slight movement behind me. I gave a start and glanced backward. It was Mr. Williamson Green turning over in his bed; what if he should awake? His back was now toward me, and my impulse was to fly and leave everything behind me; but my father had ordered me to bring the box, and he expected his orders to be obeyed. I had often been convinced of that.

"I stood perfectly motionless for a minute or so, and when the gentleman recommenced his regular and very audible breathing I felt it safe to proceed with my task. Taking hold of the box I found it was much heavier than I expected it to be; but I moved gently away with it and passed into the back room.

"There I could not refrain from stopping a moment by the side of the sleeping babe, upon whose cherub-like face the light of the night lamp dimly shone. The little child was still sleeping sweetly, and my impulse was to stop and kiss it; but I knew that this would be wrong. The infant might awake and utter a cry and my father's joke be spoiled. I moved to the open window, and with some trouble, and, I think, without any noise, I succeeded in getting out upon the trellis with the box under my arm. The descent was awkward, but my father was a tall man, and, reaching upward, relieved me of my burden before I got to the ground.

" 'I didn't remember it was so heavy,' he whispered, 'or I should have given you a rope to lower it down by. If you had dropped it and spoiled my instruments, and made a lot of noise besides, I should have been angry enough.'

"I was very glad my father was not angry, and following him over the greensward we quickly reached the boat, where the box was stowed away under the bow to keep it from injury.

"We pushed off as quietly as possible and rowed swiftly down the river. When we had gone about a mile I suddenly dropped my oar with an exclamation of dismay.

"'What's the matter?' cried my father.

"'Oh, I have done a dreadful thing!' I said. 'Oh, father, I must go back!'

"I am sorry to say that at this my father swore.

"'What do you want to go back for?' he said.

"'Just to think of it! I have left open the window in which that beautiful child was sleeping. If it should take cold and die from the damp air of the river blowing upon it I should never forgive myself. Oh, if I had only thought of climbing up the trellis again and pulling down that sash! I am sure I could go back and do it without making the least noise.' My father gave a grunt; but what the grunt meant I do not know, and for a few moments he was silent, and then he said:

"'Thomas, you cannot go back; the distance is too great, the tide is against us, and it is time that you and I were both in our beds. Nothing may happen to that baby; but, attend to my words now, if any harm should come to that child it will go hard with you. If it should die it would be of no use for you to talk about practical jokes. You would be held responsible for its death. I was going to say to you that it might be as well for you not to say anything about this little venture until I had seen how Williamson Green took the joke. Some people get angry with very little reason, although I hardly believe he's that sort of a man; but now things are different. He thinks all the world of that child, which is the only one they've got; and if you want to stay outside of jail or the house of refuge I warn you never to say a word of where you have been this night.'

"With this he began to row again, and I followed his example, but with a very heavy heart. All that night I dreamt of the little child with the damp night winds blowing in upon it."

"Did you ever hear if it caught cold?" asked Aunt Martha.

"No," replied the burglar, "I never did. I mentioned the matter to my father, and he said that he had great fears upon the subject, for although he had written to Williamson

Green, asking him to return the instruments, he had not seen him or heard from him, and he was afraid that the child had died or was dangerously sick. Shortly after that my father sent me on a little trip to the Long Island coast to collect some bills from people for whom he had done work. He gave me money to stay a week or two at the seashore, saying that the change would do me good; and it was while I was away on this delightful holiday that an event occurred which had a most disastrous effect upon my future life. My father was arrested for burglary!

"It appeared—and I cannot tell you how shocked I was when I discovered the truth—that the box which I had carried away did not contain nautical instruments, but was filled with valuable plate and jewels. My unfortunate father heard from a man who had been discharged from the service of the family whose house he had visited—whose name, by the way, was not Green—where the box containing the valuables mentioned was always placed at night, and he had also received accurate information in regard to the situation of the rooms and the best method of gaining access to them.

"I believe that some arrangement had been made between my father and this discharged servant in regard to a division of the contents of the box, and it was on account of a disagreement on this subject that the man became very angry, and after pocketing what my father thought was his fair share he departed to unknown regions, leaving behind a note to the police which led to my father's arrest."

"That was a mean trick," said Aunt Martha.

The burglar looked at her gratefully.

"In the lower spheres of life, madam, such things often happen. Some of the plate and jewels were found in my father's possession, and he was speedily tried and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. And now, can you imagine, ladies," said the tall burglar, apparently having become satisfied to address himself to Aunt Martha as well as my wife, "the wretched position in which I found myself? I was upbraided as the son of a thief. I soon found myself without home, without occupation, and, alas! without good reputation. I was careful not to mention my voluntary connection with my father's crime for fear that should I do so

I might be compelled to make a statement which might increase the severity of his punishment. For this reason I did not dare to make inquiries concerning the child in whom I had taken such an interest, and whose little life I had, perhaps, imperilled. I never knew, ladies, whether that infant grew up or not.

"But I, alas! grew up to a life of hardship and degradation. It would be impossible for persons in your sphere of life to understand what I now was obliged to suffer. Suitable employment I could not obtain, because I was the son of a burglar. With a father in the State prison it was of no use for me to apply for employment at any respectable place of business. I labored at one thing and another, sometimes engaging in the most menial employments. I also had been educated and brought up by my dear mother for a very different career. Sometimes I managed to live fairly well; sometimes I suffered. Always I suffered from the stigma of my father's crime; always in the eyes of the community in which I lived—a community, I am sorry to say, incapable, as a rule, of making correct judgments in delicate cases like these—I was looked upon as belonging to the ranks of the dishonest. It was a hard lot, and sometimes almost impossible to bear up under.

"I have spoken at length, ladies, in order that you may understand my true position; and I wish to say that I have never felt the crushing weight of my father's disgrace more deeply than I felt it last evening. This man," nodding toward the stout burglar, "came to me shortly after I had eaten my supper, which happened to be a frugal one, and said to me:

" 'Thomas, I have some business to attend to to-night, in which you can help me if you choose. I know you are a good mechanic.'

" 'If it is work that will pay me,' I answered, 'I should be very glad to do it, for I am greatly in need of money.'

" 'It will pay,' said he; and I agreed to assist him.

"As we were walking to the station, as the business to be attended to was out of town, this man, whose name is James Barlow, talked to me in such a way that I began to suspect that he intended to commit a burglary, and openly charged

him with this evil purpose. 'You may call it burglary or anything else you please,' said he; 'property is very unequally divided in this world, and it is my business in life to make wrong things right as far as I can. I am going to the house of a man who has a great deal more than he needs, and I haven't anything like as much as I need; and so I intend to take some of his overplus—not very much, for when I leave his house he will still be a rich man, and I'll be a poor one. But for a time my family will not starve.'

"'Argue as you please, James Barlow,' I said, 'what you are going to do is nothing less than burglary.'

"'Of course it is,' said he; 'but it's all right, all the same. There are a lot of people, Thomas, who are not as particular about these things as they used to be, and there is no use for you to seem better than your friends and acquaintances. Now, to show there are not so many bigots as there used to be, there's a young man going to meet us at the station who is greatly interested in the study of social problems. He is going along with us just to look into this sort of thing and study it. It is impossible for him to understand people of our class, or do anything to make their condition better, if he does not thoroughly investigate their methods of life and action. He's going along just as a student, nothing more; and he may be down on the whole thing for all I know. He pays me five dollars for the privilege of accompanying me, and whether he likes it or not is his business. I want you to go along as a mechanic, and if your conscience won't let you take any share in the profit, I'll just pay you for your time.'

"'James Barlow,' said I, 'I am going with you, but for a purpose far different from that you desire. I shall keep by your side, and if I can dissuade you from committing the crime you intend I shall do so; but if I fail in this, and you deliberately break into a house for purposes of robbery, I shall arouse the inmates and frustrate your crime.' Now, James Barlow," said he, turning to the stout man with a severe expression on his strongly marked face, "is not what I have said perfectly true? Did you not say to me every word which I have just repeated?"

The stout man looked at the other in a very odd way.

His face seemed to broaden and redden, and he merely closed his eyes as he promptly answered:

"That's just what I said, every blasted word of it. You've told it fair and square, leavin' off nothin' and puttin' in nothin'. You've told the true facts out and out, up and down, without a break."

"Now, ladies," continued the tall man, "you see my story is corroborated, and I will conclude it by saying that when this house, in spite of my protest, had been opened, I entered with the others with the firm intention of stepping into a hallway or some other suitable place and announcing in a loud voice that the house was about to be robbed. As soon as I found the family aroused and my purpose accomplished, I intended to depart as quickly as possible, for, on acount of the shadow cast upon me by my father's crime, I must never be found even in the vicinity of criminal action. But as I was passing through this room I could not resist the invitation of Barlow to partake of the refreshments which we saw upon the table. I was faint from fatigue and insufficient nourishment. It seemed a very little thing to taste a drop of wine in a house where I was about to confer a great benefit. I yielded to the temptation, and now I am punished. Partaking even that little which did not belong to me, I find myself placed in my present embarrassing position."

"You are right there," said I, "it must be embarrassing; but before we have any more reflections, there are some practical points about which I wish you would inform me. How did that wicked man, Mr. Barlow I think you called him, get into this house?"

The tall man looked at me for a moment, as if in doubt what he should say; and then his expression of mingled hopelessness and contrition changed into one of earnest frankness.

"I will tell you, sir, exactly," he said; "I have no wish to conceal anything. I have long wanted to have an opportunity to inform occupants of houses, especially those in the suburbs, of the insufficiency of their window fastenings. Familiar with mechanic devices as I am, and accustomed to think of such things, the precautions of householders sometimes move me to laughter. Your outer doors, front and

back, are of heavy wood, chained, locked, and bolted, often double locked and bolted; but your lower windows are closed in the first place by the lightest kind of shutters, which are very seldom fastened at all, and in the second place by a little contrivance connecting the two sashes, which is held in place by a couple of baby screws. If these contrivances are of the best kind and cannot be opened from the outside with a knife-blade or piece of tin, the burglar puts a chisel or jimmy under the lower sash and gently presses it upward, when the baby screws come out as easily as if they were babies' milk-teeth. Not for a moment does the burglar trouble himself about the front door, with its locks and chains and bolts. He goes to the window, with its baby screws, which might as well be left open as shut, for all the hindrance it is to his entrance; and if he meddled with the door at all, it is simply to open it from the inside, so that when he is ready to depart he may do so easily."

"But all that does not apply to my windows," I said. "They are not fastened that way."

"No, sir," said the man, "your lower shutters are solid and strong as your doors. This is right, for if shutters are intended to obstruct entrance to a house they should be as strong as the doors. When James Barlow first reached this house he tried his jimmy on one of the shutters in this main building, but he could not open it. The heavy bolt inside was too strong for him. Then he tried another near by with the same result. You will find the shutters splintered at the bottom. Then he walked to the small addition at the back of the house, where the kitchen is located. Here the shutters were smaller, and of course the inside bolts were smaller. Everything in harmony. Builders are so careful now-a-days to have everything in harmony. When Barlow tried his jimmy on one of these shutters the bolt resisted for a time, but its harmonious proportions caused it to bend, and it was soon drawn from its staples and the shutter opened, and of course the sash was opened as I told you sashes are opened."

"Well," said I, "shutters and sashes of mine shall never be opened in that way again."

"It was with that object that I spoke to you," said the tall man. "I wish you to understand the faults of your fasten-

ings, and any information I can give you which will better enable you to protect your house, I shall be glad to give, as a slight repayment for the injury I may have helped to do to you in the way of broken glass and spoiled carpet. I have made window fastenings an especial study, and, if you employ me for the purpose, I'll guarantee that I will put your house into a condition which will be absolutely burglar proof. If I do not do this to your satisfaction, I will not ask to be paid a cent."

"We will not consider that proposition now," I said, "for you may have other engagements which would interfere with the proposed job." I was about to say that I thought we had enough of this sort of story, when Aunt Martha interrupted me.

"It seems to me," she said, speaking to the tall burglar, "that you have instincts, and perhaps convictions, of what is right and proper; but it is plain that you allow yourself to be led and influenced by unprincipled companions. You should avoid even the outskirts of evil. You may not know that the proposed enterprise is a bad one, but you should not take part in it unless you know that it is a good one. In such cases you should be rigid."

The man turned toward my aunt, and looked steadfastly at her, and as he gazed his face grew sadder and sadder.

"Rigid," he repeated; "that is hard."

"Yes," I remarked, "that is one of the meanings of the word."

Paying no attention to me, he continued:

"Madam," said he, with a deep pathos in his voice, "no one can be better aware than I am that I have made many mistakes in the course of my life; but that quality on which I think I have reason to be satisfied with myself is my rigidity when I know a thing is wrong. There occurs to me now an instance in my career which will prove to you what I say.

"I knew a man by the name of Spotkirk, who had invented a liniment for the cure of boils. He made a great success with his liniment, which he called Boilene, and at the time I speak of he was a very rich man.

One day Spotkirk came to me and told me he wanted me

to do a piece of business for him, for which he would pay me twenty-five dollars. I was glad to hear this, for I was greatly in need of money, and I asked him what it was he wanted me to do.

"'You know Timothy Barker,' said he. 'Well, Timothy and I have had a misunderstanding, and I want you to be a referee or umpire between us, to set things straight.'

"'Very good,' said I, 'and what is the point of difference?'

"'I'll put the whole thing before you,' said he, 'for of course you must understand it or you can't talk properly to Timothy. Now, you see, in the manufacture of my Boilene I need a great quantity of good yellow gravel, and Timothy Barker has got a gravel pit of that kind. Two years ago I agreed with Timothy that he should furnish me with all the gravel I should want for one-eighth of one per cent. of the profits on the Boilene. We didn't sign no papers, for which I am sorry, but that was the agreement; and now Timothy says that one-eighth of one per cent. isn't enough. He has gone wild about it, and actually wants ten per cent., and threatens to sue me if I don't give it to him.'

"'Are you obliged to have gravel? Wouldn't something else do for your purpose?'

"'There's nothing as cheap,' said Spotkirk. 'You see I have to have lots and lots of it. Every day I fill a great tank with the gravel and let water onto it. This soaks through the gravel, and comes out a little pipe in the bottom of the tank of a beautiful yellow color; sometimes it is too dark, and then I have to thin it with more water.'

"'Then you bottle it,' I said.

"'Yes,' said Spotkirk; 'then there is all the expense and labor of bottling it.'

"'Then you put nothing more into it,' said I.

"'What more goes into it before it's corked,' said Spotkirk, 'is my business. That's my secret, and nobody's been able to find it out. People have had Boilene analyzed by chemists, but they can't find out the hidden secret of its virtue. There's one thing that everybody who has used it does know, and that is that it is a sure cure for boils. If applied for two or three days according to directions, and at the proper stage, the boil is sure to disappear. As a proof

of its merit I have sold seven hundred and forty-eight thousand bottles this year.'

"'At a dollar a bottle?' said I.

"'That is the retail price,' said he.

"'Now, then, Mr. Spotkirk,' said I, 'it will not be easy to convince Timothy Barker that one-eighth of one per cent. is enough for him. I suppose he hauls his gravel to your factory?'

"'Hauling's got nothing to do with it,' said he; 'gravel is only ten cents a load anywhere, and if I choose I could put my factory right in the middle of a gravel pit. Timothy Barker has nothing to complain of.

"'But he knows you are making a lot of money,' said I, 'and it will be a hard job to talk him over. Mr. Spotkirk, it's worth every cent of fifty dollars.'

"'Now look here,' said he; 'if you get Barker to sign a paper that will suit me, I'll give you fifty dollars. I'd rather do that than have him bring a suit. If the matter comes up in the courts those rascally lawyers will be trying to find out what I put into my Boilene, and that sort of thing would be sure to hurt my business. It won't be so hard to get a hold on Barker if you go to work the right way. You can just let him understand that you know all about that robbery at Bonsall's clothing-store, where he kept the stolen goods in his barn, covered up with hay, for nearly a week. It would be a good thing for Timothy Barker to understand that somebody else beside me knows about that business, and if you bring it in right, it will fetch him around, sure.'

"I kept quiet for a minute or two, and then I said:

"'Mr. Spotkirk, this is an important business. I can't touch it under a hundred dollars.' He looked hard at me, and then he said:

"'Do it right, and a hundred dollars is yours.'

"After that I went to see Timothy Barker, and had a talk with him. Timothy was boiling over, and considered himself the worst-cheated man in the world. He had only lately found out how Spotkirk made his Boilene, and what a big sale he had for it, and he was determined to have more of the profits.

"'Just look at it!' he shouted; 'when Spotkirk has washed

out my gravel it's worth more than it was before, and he sells it for twenty-five cents a load to put on gentlemen's places. Even out of that he makes a hundred and fifty per cent. profit.'

"I talked a good deal more with Timothy Barker, and found out a good many things about Spotkirk's dealings with him, and then in an off-hand manner I mentioned the matter of the stolen goods in his barn, just as if I had known all about it from the very first. At this Timothy stopped shouting, and became as meek as a mouse. He said nobody was as sorry as he was when he found the goods concealed in his barn had been stolen, and that if he had known it before the thieves took them away he should have informed the authorities; and then he went on to tell me how he got so poor and so hard up by giving his whole time to digging and hauling gravel for Spotkirk, and neglecting his little farm, that he did not know what was going to become of him and his family if he couldn't make better terms with Spotkirk for the future, and he asked me very earnestly to help him in this business if I could.

"Now, then, I set myself to work to consider this business. Here was a rich man oppressing a poor one, and here was this rich man offering me one hundred dollars—which in my eyes was a regular fortune—to help him get things so fixed that he could keep on oppressing the poor one. Now, then, here was a chance for me to show my principles. Here was a chance for me to show myself what you, madam, call rigid; and rigid I was. I just set that dazzling one hundred dollars aside, much as I wanted it. Much as I actually needed it, I wouldn't look at it, or think of it. I just said to myself, 'If you can do any good in this matter, do it for the poor man;' and I did do it for Timothy Barker with his poor wife and seven children, only two of them old enough to help him in the gravel pit. I went to Spotkirk and I talked to him, and I let him see that if Timothy Barker showed up the Boilene business, as he threatened to do, it would be a bad day for the Spotkirk family. He tried hard to talk me over to his side, but I was rigid, madam, I was rigid, and the business ended in my getting seven per cent. of the profits of Boilene for that poor man, Timothy Barker,

and his large family; and their domestic prosperity is entirely due—I say it without hesitation—to my efforts on their behalf, and to my rigidity in standing up for the poor against the rich."

"Of course," I here remarked, "you don't care to mention anything about the money you squeezed out of Timothy Barker by means of your knowledge that he had been a receiver of stolen goods, and I suppose the Boilene man gave you something to get the percentage brought down from ten per cent. to seven."

The tall burglar turned and looked at me with an air of saddened resignation.

"Of course," said he, "it is of no use for a man in my position to endeavor to set himself right in the eyes of one who is prejudiced against him. My hope is that those present who are not prejudiced will give my statements the consideration they deserve."

"Which they certainly will do," I continued. Turning to my wife and Aunt Martha, "As you have heard this fine story, I think it is time for you to retire."

"I do not wish to retire," promptly returned Aunt Martha. "I was never more awake in my life, and couldn't go asleep if I tried. What we have heard may or may not be true, but it furnishes subjects for reflection—serious reflection. I wish very much to hear what that man in the middle of the bench has to say for himself; I am sure he has a story."

"Yes, ma'am," said the stout man, with animation. "I've got one, and I'd like nothin' better than to tell it to you if you'll give me a little somethin' to wet my lips with—a little beer, or whiskey and water, or anything you have convenient."

"Whiskey and water!" said Aunt Martha with severity. "I should think not. It seems to me you have had all the intoxicating liquors in this house that you would want."

"But I don't think you're the kind of person who'd doctor the liquor. This is the first gentleman's house where I ever found anything of that kind."

"The worse for the gentleman," I remarked. The man grunted.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "call it anything you please—milk,

cider, or, if you have nothin' else, I'll take water. I can't talk without somethin' soaky."

My wife rose. "If we are to listen to another story," she said, "I want something to keep up my strength. I shall go into the dining-room and make some tea, and Aunt Martha can give these men some of that if she likes."

The ladies now left the room, followed by Alice. Presently they called me, and, leaving the burglars in charge of the vigilant David, I went to them. I found them making tea.

"I have been upstairs to see if George William is all right, and now I want you to tell me what you think of that man's story," said my wife.

"I don't think it a story at all," said I. "I call it a lie. A story is a relation which purports to be fiction, no matter how much like truth it may be, and is intended to be received as fiction. A lie is a false statement made with the intention to deceive, and that is what I believe we have heard to-night."

"I agree with you exactly," said my wife.

"It may be," said Aunt Martha, "that the man's story is true. There are some things about it which make me think so; but if he is really a criminal he must have had trials and temptations which led him into his present mode of life. We should consider that."

"I have been studying him," I said, "and I think he is a born rascal, who ought to have been hung long ago."

My aunt looked at me. "John," she said, "if you believe people are born criminals, they ought to be executed in their infancy. It could be done painlessly by electricity, and society would be the gainer, although you lawyers would be the losers. But I do not believe in your doctrine. If the children of the poor were properly brought up and educated, fewer of them would grow to be criminals."

"I don't think this man suffered for want of education," said my wife; "he used very good language; that was one of the first things that led me to suspect him. It is not likely that sons of boat-builders speak so correctly and express themselves so well."

"Of course, I cannot alter your opinions," said Aunt

Martha, "but the story interested me, and I very much wish to hear what that other man has to say for himself."

"Very well," said I, "you shall hear it; but I must drink my tea and go back to the prisoners."

"And I," said Aunt Martha, "will take some tea to them. They may be bad men, but they must not suffer."

I had been in the library but a few moments when Aunt Martha entered, followed by Alice, who bore a tray containing three very large cups of tea and some biscuit.

"Now, then," said Aunt Martha to me, "if you will untie their hands, I will give them some tea."

At these words each burglar turned his eyes on me with a quick glance. I laughed.

"Hardly," said I. "I would not be willing to undertake the task of tying them up again, unless, indeed, they will consent to drink some more of my wine."

"Which we won't do," said the middle burglar, "and that's flat."

"Then they must drink this tea with their hands tied," said Aunt Martha, in a tone of reproachful resignation, and, taking a cup from the tray, she approached the stout man and held it up to his lips. At this act of extreme kindness we were all amused, even the burglar's companions smiled, and David so far forgot himself as to burst into a laugh, which, however, he quickly checked. The stout burglar, however, saw nothing to laugh at. He drank the tea, and never drew breath until the cup was emptied.

"I forgot," said my aunt, as she removed the cup from his lips, "to ask you whether you took much or little sugar."

"Don't make no difference to me," answered the man; "tea isn't malt liquor; it's poor stuff any way, and it doesn't matter to me whether it's got sugar in it or not, but it's moistenin', and that's what I want. Now, madam, I'll just say to you, if ever I break into a room where you're sleepin', I'll see that you don't come to no harm, even if you sit up in bed and holler."

"Thank you," said Aunt Martha; "but I hope you will never again be concerned in that sort of business."

He grinned. "That depends on circumstances," said he.

Aunt Martha now offered the tall man some tea, but he

thanked her very respectfully, and declined. The young man also said that he did not care for tea, but that if the maid—looking at Alice—would give him a glass of water he would be obliged. This was the first time he had spoken. His voice was low and of a pleasing tone. David's face grew dark, and we could see that he objected to this service from Alice.

"I will give him the water myself," said Aunt Martha. This she did, and I noticed that the man's thirst was very soon satisfied. When David had been refreshed, and biscuits refused by the burglars, who could not very well eat them with their hands tied, we all sat down, and the stout man began his story. I give it as he told it, omitting some coarse and rough expressions, and a good deal of slang which would be unintelligible to the general reader.

"There's no use," said the burglar, "for me to try and make any of you believe that I'm a pious gentleman under a cloud, for I know I don't look like it, and wouldn't be likely to make out a case."

At this the tall man looked at him very severely.

"I don't mean to say," he continued, "that my friend here tried anything like that. Every word he said was perfectly true, as I could personally testify if I was called upon the stand, and what I'm goin' to tell you is likewise solid fact.

"My father was a cracksman, and a first-rate one, too; he brought me up to the business, beginning when I was very small. I don't remember havin' any mother, so I'll leave her out. My old man was very particular; he liked to see things done right. One day I was with him, and we saw a tinner nailing a new leader or tin water-spout to the side of a house.

" 'Look here, young man,' says Dad, 'you're makin' a pretty poor job of that. You don't put in enough nails, and they ain't half drove in. Supposin' there was a fire in that house some night, and the family had to come down by the spout, and your nails would give way, and they'd break their necks. What would you think then? And I can tell you what it is, young man, I can appear ag'in you for doing poor work.'

"The tinner grumbled, but he used more nails and drove 'em tight, Dad and me standin' by, an' looking at him. One

rainy night not long after this Dad took me out with him and we stopped in front of this house. 'Now, Bobbie,' said he, 'I want you to climb into that open second-story window, and then slip downstairs and open the front door for me; the family's at dinner.'

"'How am I to get up, Dad?' said I.

"Oh, you can go up the spout,' says he; 'I'll warrant that it will hold you. I've seen to it that it was put on good and strong.'

"I tried it, and as far as I can remember I never went up a safer spout."

"And you opened the front door?" asked Aunt Martha.

"Indeed I did, ma'am," said the burglar, "you wouldn't catch me makin' no mistakes in that line.

"After a while I got too heavy to climb spouts, and I took to the regular business, and did well at it, too."

"Do you mean to say," asked Aunt Martha, "that you willingly and premeditatedly became a thief and midnight robber?"

"That's what I am, ma'am," said he; "I don't make no bones about it. I'm a number one, double-extra, back-springed, copper-fastened burglar, with all the attachments and noiseless treadle. That's what I am, and no mistake. "There's all kinds of businesses in this world, and there's got to be people to work at every one of 'em; and when a fellow takes any particular line, his business is to do it well; that's my motto. When I break into a house I make it a point to clean it out first-class, and not to carry away no trash, nuther. Of course, I've had my ups and my downs, like other people—preachers and doctors and storekeepers—they all have them, and I guess the downs are more amusin' than the ups, at least to outsiders. I've just happened to think of one of them, and I'll let you have it.

"There was a man I knew named Jerry Hammond, that was a contractor, and sometimes he had pretty big jobs on hand, buildin' or road-makin' or somethin' or other. He'd contract to do anything, would Jerry, no matter whether he'd ever done it before or not. I got to know his times and seasons for collecting money, and I laid for him."

"Abominable meanness!" exclaimed my wife.

"It's all business," said the stout man, quite unabashed. "You don't catch a doctor refusin' to practice on a friend, or a lawyer, nuther, and in our line of business it's the same thing. It was about the end of October, nigh four years ago, that I found out that Jerry had a lot of money on hand. He'd been collectin' it from different parties, and had got home too late in the day to put it in the bank, so says I to myself, this is your time, old fellow, and you'd better make hay while the sun shines. I was a little afraid to crack Jerry's house by myself, for he's a strong old fellow, so I got a man named Putty Henderson to go along with me. Putty was a big fellow and very handy with a jimmy; but he was awful contrary-minded, and he wouldn't agree to clean out Jerry until I promised to go halves with him. This wasn't fair, for it wasn't his job, and a quarter would have been lots for him.

"But there wasn't no use arguin', and along we went, and about one o'clock we was standin' alongside Jerry's bed, where he was fast asleep. He was a bachelor, and lived pretty much by himself. I give him a punch to waken him up, for we'd made up our minds that was the way to work this job. It wouldn't pay us to go around huntin' for Jerry's money. He was such a sharp old fellow, it was six to four we'd never find it. He sat up in bed with a jump like a hop-toad, and looked first at one and then at the other of us. We both had masks on, and it wasn't puzzlin' to guess what we was there fur.

"'Jerry Hammond,' says I, speakin' rather rough and husky, 'we knows that you've got a lot o' money in this house, and we've come fur it. We mean business, and there is no use foolin'. You can give it to us quiet and easy, and keep a whole head on your shoulders, or we'll lay you out ready fur a wake and help ourselves to the funds; and now you pays your money and you can take your choice how you do it. There's nothin' shabby about us, but we mean business. Don't we, pard?'—'That's so,' says Putty.

"'Look here,' says Jerry, jest as cool as if he had been sittin' outside on his own curbstone, 'I know you two men and no mistake. You're Tommy Randall, and you're Putty Henderson, so you might as well take off them masks.'—

'Which I am glad to do,' says I, 'for I hate 'em,' and I put mine in my pocket, and Putty he took off his."

"Excuse me," said Aunt Martha, interrupting at this point, "but when Mr. Hammond mentioned the name of Tommy Randall, to whom did he refer?"

"I can explain that, madam," said the tall burglar, quickly. "This man by his criminal course of life has got himself into a good many scrapes, and is frequently obliged to change his name. Since I accidentally became acquainted with him he has had several aliases, and I think that he very often forgets that his real name is James Barlow."

"That's so," said the stout man, "there never was a more correct person than this industrious and unfortunate man sittin' by me. I am dreadful forgetful, and sometimes I disremember what belongs to me and what don't. Names the same as other things.

" 'Well, now, Jerry,' says I, 'you needn't think you're goin' to make anythin' by knowin' us. You've got to fork over your cash all the same, and if you think to make anything by peachin' on us after we've cleared out and left you peaceful in your bed, you're mistook so far as I'm concerned; for I've made the track clear to get out of this town before daybreak, and I don't know when I'll come back. This place is gettin' a little too hot for me, and you're my concludin' exercise.' Jerry he sat still for a minute, considerin'. He wasn't no fool, and he knowed that there wasn't no use gettin' scared, nor cussin', nor hollerin'. What's more, he knowed that we was there to get his money, and if he didn't fork it over he'd get himself laid out, and that was worse than losin' money any day. 'Now, boys, says he, 'I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make you an offer; a fair and square offer. What money I've got I'll divide even with you, each of us takin' a third, and I'll try to make up what I lose out of my next contract. Now nothin' could be no squarer than that.'—'How much money have you got, Jerry?' says I, 'that's the first thing to know.'—'I've got thirty-one hundred dollars even,' says he, 'and that will be one thousand and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents apiece. I've got bills to pay tomorrow for lumber and bricks, and my third will pay 'em. If I don't I'll go to pieces. You don't want to see me break up

business, do you?'—'Now, Jerry,' says I, 'that won't do. You haven't got enough to divide into three parts. Putty and me agree to go halves with what we get out of you, and when I lay out a piece of business I don't make no changes. Half of that money is for me, and half is for Putty. So just hand it out, and don't let's have no more jabberin'.'

"Jerry he looked at me pretty hard, and then says he: 'You're about the close-fisted and meanest man I ever met with. Here I offer you a third part of my money, and all you've got to do is to take it and go away peaceable. I'd be willin' to bet two to one that it's more than you expected to get, and yet you are not satisfied; now, I'll be hanged if I'm going to do business with you.'—'You can be hanged if you like,' says I, 'but you'll do the business all the same,'—'No, I won't,' says he, and he turns to Putty Henderson. 'Now, Putty,' says he, 'you've got a pile more sense than this pal of yourn, and I'm goin' to see if I can't do business with you. Now, you and me together can lick this Tommy Randall just as easy as not, and if you'll help me do it I'll not only divide the money with you, but I'll give you fifty dollars extra, so that instead of fifteen hundred and fifty dollars—that's all he'd given you, if he didn't cheat you—you'll have sixteen hundred, and I'll have fifteen hundred instead of the thousand and thirty-three dollars which I would have had left if my first offer had been took. So, Putty, what do you say to that?' Now, Putty, he must have been a little sore with me on account of the arguments we'd had about dividin', and he was mighty glad besides to get the chance of makin' fifty dollars extry, and so he said it was all right, and he'd agree. Then I thought it was about time for me to take in some of my sail, and says I: 'Jerry, that's a pretty good joke, and you can take my hat as soon as I get a new one, but of course I don't mean to be hard on you, and if you really have bills to pay to-morrow I'll take a third, and Putty'll take another, and we'll go away peaceful.'—'No, you won't,' sings out Jerry, and with that he jumps out of bed right at me, and Putty Henderson he comes at me from the other side, and, between the two, they gave me the worst lickin' I ever got in my born days, and then they dragged me downstairs and kicked me out the front door, and I had hardly time to pick myself up

before I saw a policeman about a block off, and if he hadn't been a fat one he'd had me sure. It wouldn't have been pleasant, for I was a good deal wanted about that time.

"So you see, ladies and gents, that it's true what I said—things don't always go right in our line of business no more than any other one."

"I think you were served exactly right," said Aunt Martha; "and I wonder such an experience did not induce you to reform."

"It did, ma'am, it did," said the burglar. "I made a vow that night that if ever again I had to call in any one to help me in business of that kind I wouldn't go pards with him. I'd pay him so much for the job, and I'd take the risks, and I've stuck to it.

"But even that don't always work. Luck sometimes goes ag'in' a man, even when he's working by himself. I remember a thing of that kind that was beastly hard on me. A gentleman employed me to steal his daughter."

"What!" exclaimed my wife and Aunt Martha. "Steal his own daughter! What do you mean by that?"

"That's what it was," said the stout burglar; "no more nor less. I was recommended to the gent as a reliable party for that sort of thing, and I met him to talk it over, and then he told me just how the case stood. He and his wife were separated, and the daughter, about eleven years old, had been given to her by the court, and she put it into a boardin' school, and the gent he was goin' to Europe, and he wanted to get the little gal and take her with him. He tried to get her once, but it slipped up, and so there wasn't no good in his showin' hisself at the school any more, which was in the country, and he knowed that if he expected to get the gal he'd have to hire a professional to attend to it.

"Now, when I heard what he had to say, I put on the strictly pious, and, says I, 'that's a pretty bad thing you're askin' me to do, sir, to carry away a little gal from its lovin' mother, and more 'an that, to take it from a school where it's gettin' all the benefits of eddication.'—'Eddication,' says he; 'that's all stuff. What eddication the gal gets at a school like that isn't worth a row of pins, and when they go away they don't know nothin' useful, nor even anything tip-top

ornamental. All they've learned is the pianer and higher mathematics. As for anythin' useful, they're nowhere. There isn't one of them could bound New Jersey or tell you when Washington crossed the Delaware.'—'That may be, sir,' says I, 'but them higher branches comes useful. If Washington really did cross the Delaware, your little gal could ask somebody when it was, but she couldn't ask 'em how the pianer was played, nor what the whole multiplication table came to added up. Them things she'd have to learn how to do for herself. I give you my word, sir, I couldn't take a little gal from a school, where she was gettin' a number one eddication, silver forks and towels extry.' The gent looked pretty glum, for he was to sail the next day, and if I didn't do the job for him he didn't know who would, and he said that he was sorry to see that I was goin' back on him after the recommend I'd had, and I said that I wouldn't go back on him if it wasn't for my conscience. I was ready to do any common piece of business, but this stealin' away little gals from lovin' mothers was a leetle too much for me. 'Well,' says he, 'there ain't no time to be lost, and how much more will satisfy your conscience?' When I said a hundred dollars, we struck the bargain.

"Well, we cut and dried that business pretty straight. I took a cab and went out to the school, and the gent he got the key of a house that was to let about three miles from the school, and he was to stay there and look at that empty house until I brought him the gal, when he was to pay me and take her away. I'd like to have had more time, so that I could go out and see how the land laid, but there wasn't no more time, and I had to do the best I could. The gent told me they all went a walkin' every afternoon, and that if I laid low that would be the best time to get her, and I must just fetch her along, no matter who hollered.

"I didn't know exactly how I was going to manage it, but I took along with me a big bag that was made for the conveyance of an extinct millionaire, but which had never been used, owin' to beforehand arrangements which had been made with the party's family.

"I left the cab behind a bit of woods, not far from the school, and then I laid low, and pretty soon I seed 'em all

coming out, in a double line, with the teacher behind 'em, for a walk. I had a description of the little gal as was wanted, and as they come nearer I made her out easy. She was the only real light-haired one in the lot. I hid behind some bushes in the side of the road, and when they come up, and the light-haired little gal was just opposite to me, I jumped out of the bushes and made a dash at her. Whoop! what a row there was in one second! Such a screamin' and screechin' of gals, such a pilin' on top each other, and the teacher on top the whole of 'em, bangin' with her umbrella; they pulled at the gal and they pulled at me, an' they yelled and they howled, and I never was in such a row and hope I never shall be again, and I grabbed that girl by her frock, and I tumbled some over one way and some another, and I got the umbrella over my head, but I didn't mind it, and I clapped that bag over the little gal, and I jerked up her feet and let her slip into it, and then I took her up like a bag of meal, and put across the field, with the whole kit and boodle after me. But I guess most of 'em must have tumbled down in hysterics, judgin' from the screechin', and I got up to the cab and away we went. Well, when we got to the house where I was to meet the gent, he began straight off to blow at me. 'What do you mean,' he yelled, 'bringin' my daughter in a bag?'—'It's the only way to do it, sir,' says I; 'they can't holler and they can't kick, and people passin' by don't know what you've got,' and so sayin' I untied the strings, put the little gal on her feet, and pulled off the bag, and then I'd be hanged if I ever saw a man so ragin' mad as he was. 'What do I want with that gal?' he cried; 'that's not my daughter. That girl's hair is as black as a coal, and she's a Jew besides.' As soon as I sot my eyes on the little varmint it come over me that I got the thing crooked, and in the scrimmage I let go of the right gal and grabbed another.

"I don't see how a man could help makin' mistakes with that school-teacher's umbrella whanging away at his knowledge box, but I wasn't goin' to let on. 'She ain't no Jew, nuther,' says I, 'and she's your daughter, too; you needn't try to play no tricks on me. Pay me my money and take her away as quick as you can, that's my advice, or before you know it you'll be nabbed.'—'Pay ye!' he yelled; 'do you think

I'd pay you anything for that little Jew?'—'She's just as much a Christian as you are,' says I. 'Ain't you a Christian, little gal? and isn't this gentleman your father? and ain't you surprised that he wants to give you back to be put in the bag?' I said this hopin' she'd have sense enough to say he was her father so's to get rid of me.

"The wretched gal had been clean dumbfounded when she was took out of the bag, and hadn't done nothin' so far but blubber and cry, and try to get away, which she couldn't, because I held her frock; but now she ups and screams he wasn't her father, and she'd never seen him before, and then he storms and swears, and tells me to take her back where I got her, and I tell him I'll see him hanged first, and what I want is my money; she screams, and he swears he'll not pay me a cent, and I squares off and says that I'll thrash him out of his skin, and then he calls in his coachman, and they both make at me, and I backs out the door to get my cabby to stand by me, and I found that he'd cut out, havin' most likely got frightened, afraid of bein' mixed up in trouble. Then I seed on the high road, some half a mile away, some men comin' gallopin', and the gent he looked out and seed 'em, too, and then says he to me, 'You'll jist take that little Jew gal back where you got her from; she's no use to me; I'm goin';' and at that I hollered for my money, and made a grab at him, but the coachman he tripped me over backward, and before I could git up again they was both off with the horses on a run.

"I was so mad I couldn't speak, but there wasn't no time for foolin', and I hadn't made up my mind which door I should cut out of, when the fellows on horseback went ridin' past as hard as they could go. They must have seed the carriage drivin' away, and thought for sure it had the gal in it, and they was after it, lickety-split.

"When they was clean gone I looked round for the little gal, but couldn't see her, but all a-sudden she came out of the fireplace, where she'd been hidin'. She'd got over her cryin', and over her scare, too, judgin' from her looks. 'I'm glad he's gone,' says she, 'and I'm mighty glad, too, that Mr. Haskins and them other men didn't see me.'—'Who's they?' says I.—'They's neighbors,' says she; 'if they knew I was

here they'd took me back.'—'Well, you little minx,' says I, 'isn't that what you want?'—'No,' says she. 'I didn't want to go with that man, for I don't know him, and I hate him, but I don't want to go back to that school. I hate it worse than anything in the whole world. You haven't no idea what a horrid place it is. They just work you to death, and don't give you half enough to eat. My constitution won't stand it. I've told Pop that, and he thinks so too, but Marm, she don't believe in it, and my stayin' there is all her doin'. I've been wantin' to get away for ever so long, but I didn't want to be took off in a bag; but now that I'm out of that horrid hole I don't want to go back, and if you'll take me home to Pop, I know he won't let me go back, and he'll pay you real handsome besides.'—'Who's your Pop?" says I.—'He's Mr. Groppeltacker, of Groppeltacker & Mintz, corset findings, seven hundred and something or other, I forget the number now, Broadway. Oh, Pop does a lot of business, I tell you, and he's got lots of money. He sends corset findings to South America, and Paris, and Chicago, and Madagascar, and the uttermost parts of the earth. I've heard him say that often, and you needn't be afraid of his not bein' able to pay you. A lot more than that man would have paid you for his little gal, if you'd catched the right one. So if you take me to Pop, and get me there safe and sound, it will be an awful good speck for you.'

"Now, I begins to think to myself that perhaps there was somethin' in what that little Jew gal was sayin', and that I might make something out of the gal after all. I didn't count on gettin' a big pile out of old Groppeltacker—it wasn't likely he was that kind of a man—but whatever I did get would be clean profit, and I might as well try it on. He couldn't make no charge ag'in me fur bringin' him his daughter, if she asked me to do it; so says I to her, 'Now, if I take you home to your Pop, will you promise on your word an' honor, that you won't say nothin' about my carryin' you off in a bag, and say that you seed me walkin' along the road and liked my looks, and told me you were sufferin', and asked me to take you home to your kind parents, where you might be took proper care of; and that I said I wasn't goin' that way, but I'd do it out of pure Christian charity, and nothin'

more or less, and here you was? And then, of course, you can tell him he ought to do the handsome thing by me.'—'I'll do that,' says she, 'and I tell how you talked to me awful kind for more than an hour, tryin' to keep me to stay at the school, and it wasn't till I got down on my knees and weeped that you agreed to take me to my kind father.'—'All right,' says I, 'I might as well take you along, but we'll have to go back by the railroad and foot it, at least two miles, to the station, and I don't know about walkin' across the country with a little girl dressed as fine as you are. I might get myself suspicioned.'—'That's so,' says she; 'we might meet somebody that'd know me,' and then she wriggled up her little forehead and began to think. I never did see such a little gal as sharp as that one was; needles was nothin' to her. In about a minute she says, 'Where's that bag of yourn?'—'Here it is,' says I; and then she took it and looked at it up and down, with her head cocked on one side. 'If I'd somethin' to cut that bag with,' says she, 'I could fix myself up so that nobody'd know me, don't care who it was.'—'I don't want that bag cut,' says I; 'it's an extry good bag; it was made for a particular purpose, and cost money.'—'Pop will pay expenses,' says she; 'how much did it cost?'—'It was four dollars cash,' said I.—'They cheated you like everything,' says she; 'you could get a bag like that any day for a dollar and seventy-five cents. Will you let it go at that?'—'All right,' says I, for I was tickled to see how sharp that little Jew gal was, and ten to one I'd throwed away the bag before we got to town; so she pulled a little book out of her pocket with a pencil stuck in it, and turnin' over to a blank page she put down, 'Bag, one dollar and seventy-five;' then she borrows my big knife, and holdin' the top of the bag up ag'in her belt, she made me stick a pin in it about a hand's-breadth from the floor; then she took the knife and cut the bag clean across, me a-holdin' one side of it; then she took the top end of that bag and slipped it on her, over her head and shoulders, and tied the drawin' strings in it round her waist, and it hung around her just like a skirt, nearly touchin' the ground; then she split open the rest of the bag, and made a kind of shawl out of it, puttin' it into shape with a lot o' pins, and pinnin' it on herself real clever. She had

lots of pins in her belt, and she told me that she never passed a pin in that school without pickin' it up, and that she had four hundred and fifty-nine of them now in her room, which she was mighty sorry to leave behind, and that these she had now was this day's pickin' up.

"When she got done workin' at herself you couldn't see not a ribbon nor a hem of her fine clothes; it was all black skirt and shawl, and she'd put up her sleeve, so that when her arm stuck out it was bare. Then she took all the ribbons and flowers off her hat, and crumpled it up, and when she tied it on what a guy she was. 'Now,' says she, 'I can go barefoot.'—'Which you won't,' says I, 'for you'll get your feet all cut, but you can muddy your shoes,' which she did, I pumpin' on 'em, so that the dust in the back yard would stick. Then we starts off across the country, and, upon my word, I was pretty nigh ashamed to be seen walkin' with such a little scarecrow. When I bought the tickets at the station she asked me how much they was, and put it down in her book. When we got into the cars the people all looked hard at her, and I reckon they thought some kind of a home had been burnt down, and this was one of the orphans that had been saved. But they didn't say nothin', and she fixed herself as comfortable as you please; and before long a boy came through the car with fruit in a basket, and then says she to me, 'I want two apples.' The boy had gone past us, but I got up and followed him and bought her two apples. 'How much did you give for them?' says she, when I come back.—'They was two for five cents,' says I.—'Well,' says she, 'they do stick you dreadful. Two for three cents is all papa or I pays for apples like them,' and she took out her little book and put down, 'Apples, three cents.'—'Very well, miss,' says I, 'but if you want any more refreshments you buy 'em yourself.'—'I think I'd better,' says she, and she went to work eatin' them two apples. She hadn't more than got through with 'em when the boy came around ag'in. 'I want a banana,' says she; 'lend me five cents,' which I did, and she put down, 'Cash, five cents.' Then the boy come up, and says she, 'How much are your bananas?'—'Five cents,' said he.—'For two?' says she.—'No,' says he, 'for one.'—'What do you take me for?' says she. 'I've bought bananas

before. I'll give you three cents for that one,' pointin' to the biggest in the lot.—'I can't do that,' said the boy, 'the price is five cents.'—'I'd like a banana,' says she, 'but I don't pay more'n three cents; take it or leave it,' and with that the boy went on. 'Now,' says I, 'you've gouged yourself out of a banana.'—'Not a bit of it,' says she; 'he'll be back;' and in two minutes he was back, and said she might have it for three cents. 'Have you got two coppers?' said she. 'Let me see 'em.' He said he had, and showed 'em to her, and she took 'em and the banana, and then give him five cents, and then she didn't give the change to me, but put it in her pocket. 'Now,' says she, 'if you'd buy things that way, you'd be rich in time.'

"When we got to the city we took the elevated and went up town to Forty-eighth street, and then walked over to her father's house. It was a big one, on one of the cross streets. When we got there, she told me to wait a minute, and, lookin' around to see that nobody was comin', she slipped off the skirt and the cape she had made and rolled 'em up in a bundle. 'It don't matter about my hat and shoes,' says she, 'but they wouldn't know me in such duds.' Then, handin' me the bundle, she said, 'For twenty-five cents you can get that bag mended just as good as new, so you can take it, and it will save us a dollar and a half.'—'No, you don't,' says I, for I'd had enough of her stinginess. 'I don't touch that bag ag'in, and I made up my mind that minute to charge the old man five dollars' worth. When the front door was opened, the servant gal looked as if she couldn't believe her eyes, but my young woman was as cool as you please, and she had me showed into a room off the hall, and then she went upstairs.

"I sat a-waitin' a long time, which gave me a good chance to look around at things. The room was real handsome, and I took a peep at the window fastenin's and the lay of the doors, thinkin' the knowledge might come in handy some time. Right in front of me on a table was a little yellow mouse, and it struck me as I looked at it that that must be gold. I listened if anybody was comin', and then I picked it up to see if it really was. I thought I heard the door-bell ring just then, and shut it up in my hand quick, but nobody

went to the door; and then I looked at the little mouse, and if it wasn't pure gold it was the best imitation ever I see, so I slipped it quietly in my pocket to look at it ag'in when I had time.

"Pretty soon old Groppeltacker come in, shut the door, and sot down. 'So you brought my daughter back,' says he.—'Yes,' says I.—'And you expect to be paid for it,' says he.—'Yes,' says I, 'I do.'—'How much do you ask for your services?' says he. Now, this was a sort of a staggerer, for I hadn't made up my mind how much I was goin' to ask; but there wasn't time for no more thinkin' about it, and so says I, plum, 'A hundred dollars, and there was some expenses besides.'—'Well, well,' says he, 'that seems like a good deal, just for bringin' a little gal from school. It couldn't have took you more'n a couple of hours.'—'I don't charge for time.' says I, 'it's for the risks and the science of the thing. There's mighty few men in this town could have brought your daughter home as neat as I did.'—'Well, well,' says he, rubbin' his hands, 'I expect I'll have to pay for the whole term of the school, whether she's there or not, and the business will come heavy on me. Don't you think sixty dollars would pay you?' Now, I know when you deal with this sort of a man there's always a good deal of difference splittin'; and so, says I, 'No, it won't. I might take ninety dollars, but that's the very lowest peg.'—'The very lowest?' says he, gettin' up and walkin' about a little; and then I thought I heard the door-bell ring again, and I was dreadful afraid somebody would come and call off the old man before he finished the bargain. 'Well,' says I, 'we'll call it eighty-five and expenses, and there I'll stop.'

"Groppeltacker, now he sot down ag'in and looked hard at me. 'I didn't ask you to bring my daughter back,' says he, speakin' gruff, and very different from the way he spoke before, 'and what's more, I didn't want her back, and what's more yet, I'm not goin' to pay you a red cent.'—'Now, look a-here,' says I, mighty sharp, 'none o' that, old man; fork over the money or I'll lay you out stiff as a poker, and help myself. I'm not a fellow to be fooled with, and there's nobody in this house can stop me.' Old Groppeltacker, he didn't turn a hair, but just sot there, and says he, 'Before

you blow any more, suppose you take my little gold mouse out of your pocket and hand it to me.' I must say I was took back at this, but I spoke back, as bold as brass, and said I never seed his gold mouse. 'O, ho!' says he, 'what you didn't see was the electric button under the table cover which rung a bell when the mouse was picked up. That's what I call my mouse-trap.'

"At this I jist b'iled over. 'Now,' says I, 'just you hand out every cent you've got, and your watch, too; not another word.' And I jumped up and clapped my hand on my pistol in my hip-pocket, and just at that minute there was a click and the nippers were on me, and there was a big policeman with his hand on my shoulder. I couldn't speak, I was so b'ilin' and so dumbfounded both at once. Old Groppeltacker he just leaned back and he laughed. 'You came in,' he said to the cop, 'jest the second I rang, and as soft as a cat, and the first thing that I want you to do is to take that gold mouse out of his pocket, and I'll be on hand whenever you let me know I'm wanted.' The cop he took the gold mouse out of my pocket, and says he, ' I know this fellow, and if I'm not mistook, they'll be more charges than yourn made ag'in him.' There wasn't no chance to show fight, so I didn't do it, but I says to old Groppeltacker, 'There's my expenses, you've got to pay them, anyway.'—'All right,' says he, 'jist you send in your bill, marked correct by my daughter, and I'll settle it,' and he laughed again, and the cop he took me off. Well, ladies and gents, that little piece of business, together with some other old scores, took me to Sing Sing for three years, and it tain't six months since I got out, so you can see for yourselves what hard times a fellow in my line of business sometimes has."

"Well," said Aunt Martha, "I don't approve of the Groppeltacker sort of people, but if there were more of that kind I believe there would be fewer of your kind. That story shows you in such a bad light that I believe it's true."

"Every word of it," said the man. "I wish it wasn't."

And now I spoke. "Since you claim to be a truth-telling being," I said to the stout burglar, "suppose you tell me why you never attempted before to break into my house. Every

considerable dwelling in this neighborhood has been entered, and I have no doubt you are the men who committed all the burglaries."

"No, sir," said he; "not men, I am the man who did 'em all; but these two friends of mine was never with me before in a bit of business like this. 'Tain't in their line. I have had pals with me, but they was professionals. These ain't cracksmen, they don't know nothin' about it; but this one is handy at tools, and that's the reason I brung him along, but you see he kicked, and was goin' to give me away, and this young gentleman"—

"Never mind about that young gentleman," I said; "I have a certain curiosity to know why my house was not entered when the others were."

"Well," said he, "I don't mind tellin' yer how that was. It was on account of your baby. We don't like to crack a house where there's a pretty small baby that's liable to wake up and howl any minute, and rouse up the rest of the family. There's no workin' in a house with comfort when there's such a young one about. I'll tell you what it is, all your burglar-alarms and your dogs ain't worth nuthin' alongside of a baby for guardin' a house. If a cracksman ain't careful the alarms will go off, and if he don't know how to manage dogs, the dogs will bark. But by George, sir, there ain't no providin' ag'in a baby. He'll howl any time, and nobody can tell when, so I waited till your baby was a little more settled in its ways and slept soundly, and then we come along, and here we are."

This statement very much surprised me, and did not elate me. Without saying so to any one, I had flattered myself that the burglars had heard of my precautions, and of my excellent stock of firearms, and perhaps had got a notion that I would be an intrepid man to deal with, and it was somewhat humiliating to find that it was our baby the burglars were afraid of, and not myself. My wife was amazed.

"Can it be possible," she said, "that these people know so much about our baby, and that George William has been protecting this house?"

"It makes my flesh creep," said Aunt Martha. "Do you know everything about all of us?"

"Wish I did, ma'am," said the stout burglar; "wish I'd known about that beastly liquor."

"Well, we've had enough of this," said I, rising; "and, my dear, you and Aunt Martha must be ready to go to bed, and David and I will keep guard over these fellows until morning."

At this instant the youngest burglar spoke. His face wore a very anxious expression.

"May I ask, sir," he said, "what you intend to do with me in the morning?"

"I have already said," I answered, "that I shall then hand over all of you to the officers of justice of this country."

"But, sir," said the young man, "you will surely except me. I am not at all concerned in this matter, and it would be of the greatest possible injury to me to be mixed up in it, or to be mentioned in public reports as an associate of a criminal. I'm not acquainted with the gentleman at the other end of the bench, but I have every reason to believe from what he said to me that he intended to notify you if this James Barlow proceeded to any open act. For myself, I beg you will allow me to state who and what I am, and to tell you by what a strange concatenation of circumstances I happen to find myself in my present position—one which, I assure you, causes me the greatest embarrassment and anxiety."

"We've had enough story-telling for one night," said I, "and you had better reserve your statement for the magistrate."

Here Aunt Martha put in her voice.

"That is not fair," she said, "two of them have been allowed to speak, and this one has just as much right to be heard as the others. What do you say, Cornelia?"

I hoped that my wife would put herself on my side, and would say that we had enough of this sort of thing; but female curiosity is an unknown quantity, and she unhesitatingly replied that she would like to hear the young man's story. I sat down in despair. It was useless to endeavor to withstand this yearning for personal information—one of the curses, I may say, of our present civilization. The young man gave no time for change of opinion, but immediately be-

gan. His voice was rich and rather low, and his manner exceedingly pleasing and gentle.

"I wish to state in the first place," said he, "that I am a reporter for the press. In the exercise of my vocation I have frequently found myself in peculiar and unpleasant positions, but never before have I been in a situation so embarrassing, so humiliating, as this. In the course of my studies and experiences I have found that in literature and journalism, as well as in art, one can make a true picture only of what one has seen. Imagination is all very well, often grand and beautiful; but imaginative authors show us their inner selves and not our outer world; there is to-day a demand for the real, and it is a demand which will be satisfied with nothing but the truth. I have determined, as far as in me lies, to endeavor to supply this demand, and I have devoted myself to the study of Realism.

"With this end in view, I have made it a rule never to describe anything I have not personally seen and examined. If we would thoroughly understand and appreciate our fellow-beings we must know what they do and how they do it; otherwise we cannot give them credit for their virtues, or judge them properly for their faults. If I could prevent crime I would annihilate it, and when it ceased to exist the necessity for describing it would also cease. But it does exist. It is a powerful element in the life of the human race. Being known and acknowledged everywhere, it should be understood; therefore it should be described. The grand reality of which we are a part can never be truly comprehended until we comprehend all its parts. But I will not philosophize. I have devoted myself to Realism, and in order to be a conscientious student I study it in all its branches. I am frequently called upon to write accounts of burglars and burglaries, and in order thoroughly to understand these people and their method of action I determined, as soon as the opportunity should offer itself, to accompany a burglarious expedition. My sole object was the acquisition of knowledge of the subject—knowledge which to me would be valuable, and, I may say, essential. I engaged this man, James Barlow, to take me with him the first time he should have on hand an affair of this kind, and thus it is that you find me

here to-night in this company. As I came here for the purpose of earnest and thorough investigation, I will frankly admit that I would not have interfered with his processes, but at the same time I would have seen that no material injuries should result to any members of this family."

"That was very kind of you," I said, at which my wife looked at me somewhat reproachingly.

"If he really intended it," she remarked, "and I do not see why that was not the case, it was kind in him."

"As for me," said Aunt Martha, very sympathetically, "I think that the study of Realism may be carried a great deal too far. I do not think that there is the slightest necessity for people to know anything about burglars. If people keep talking and reading about diseases they will get them, and if they keep talking and reading about crimes they will find that iniquity is catching, the same as some other things. Besides, this realistic description gets to be very tiresome. If you really want to be a writer, young man, why don't you try your hand on some original composition? Then you might write something which would be interesting."

"Ah, madam," said the young man, casting his eyes on the floor, "it would be far beyond my power to write anything more wonderful than what I have known and seen! If I may tell you some of the things which have happened to me, you will understand why I have become convinced that in this world of realities imagination must always take a second place."

"Of course we want to hear your story," said Aunt Martha; "that is what we are here for."

"If I was unbound," said the young man, looking at me, "I could speak more freely."

"No doubt of it," said I; "but perhaps you might run away before you finished your story. I wouldn't have that happen for the world."

"Don't make fun of him," said Aunt Martha. "I was going to ask you to cut him loose, but after what you say I think it would perhaps be just as well to keep them all tied until the narratives are completed."

With a sigh of resignation the young man began his story.

"I am American born, but my father, who was a civil engineer and of high rank in his profession, was obliged, when I was quite a small boy, to go to Austria, where he had made extensive contracts for the building of railroads. In that country I spent the greater part of my boyhood and youth. There I was educated in the best schools, my father sparing no money to have me taught everything that a gentleman should know. My mother died when I was a mere infant, and as my father's vocation made it necessary for him to travel a great deal, my life was often a lonely one. For society I depended entirely upon my fellow-scholars, my tutors, and masters. It was my father's intention, however, that when I had finished my studies I should go to one of the great capitals, there to mix with the world.

"But when this period arrived I was in no haste to avail myself of the advantages he offered me. My tastes were studious, my disposition contemplative, and I was a lover of rural life.

"My father had leased an old castle in Carinthia, not far from the mountains, and here he kept his books and charts, and here he came for recreation and study whenever his arduous duties gave him a little breathing-spell. For several months I had lived at this castle, happy when my father was with me and happy when I was alone. I expected soon to go to Vienna, where my father would introduce me to some of his influential friends. But day by day I postponed the journey.

"Walking one morning a few miles from the castle, I saw at the edge of a piece of woodland a female figure seated beneath a tree. Approaching nearer, I perceived that she was young, and that she was sketching. I was surprised, for I knew that in this part of the world young women, at least those of the upper classes, to which the costume and tastes of this one showed her to belong, were not allowed to wander about the country by themselves; but although I stood still and watched the young lady for some time, no companion appeared upon the scene.

"The path I had intended to take led past the piece of woodland, and I saw no reason why I should diverge from my proposed course. I accordingly proceeded, and when I

reached the young lady I bowed and raised my hat. I think that for some time she had perceived my approach, and she looked up at me with a face that was half merry, half inquisitive, and perfectly charming. I cannot describe the effect which her expression had upon me. I had never seen her before, but her look was not such a one as she would bestow upon a stranger. I had the most powerful desire to stop and speak to her, but having no right to do so, I should have passed on, had she not said to me, in the best of English, 'Good-morning, sir.' Then I stopped, you may be sure. I was so accustomed to speak to those I meet in either French or German that I involuntarily said to her, *'Bon jour, Mademoiselle.'*—'You need not speak French,' she said; 'I am neither English nor American, but I speak English. Are you the gentleman who lives in Wulrick Castle? If so, we are neighbors, and I wish you would tell me why you live there all the time alone.'

"At this I sat down by her. 'I am that person,' I said, and handed her my card. 'But before I say any more, please tell me who you are.'—'I am Marie Dorfler. My father's house is on the other side of this piece of woodland; you cannot see it from here; this is part of his estate. And now tell me why you live all by yourself in that old ruin.'—'It is not altogether a ruin,' I answered; 'part of it is in very good condition.' And then I proceeded to give her an account of my method of life and my reasons for it. 'It is interesting,' she said, 'but it is very odd.'—'I do not think it half so odd,' I answered, 'as that you should be here by yourself.'—'That is truly an out-of-the-way sort of thing,' she said; 'but just now I am doing out-of-the-way things. If I do not do them now, I shall never have the opportunity again. In two weeks I shall be married, and then I shall go to Prague, and everything will be by line and rule. No more delightful rambles by myself. No more sitting quietly in the woods watching the little birds and hares. No more making a sketch just where I please, no matter whether the ground be damp or not.'—'I wonder that you are allowed to do these things now,' I said.—'I am not allowed,' she answered. 'I do them in hours when I am supposed to be painting flower pieces in an upper room.'—'But when you're married,' I said, 'your hus-

band will be your companion in such rambles.'—'Hardly,' she said, shrugging her shoulders; 'he will be forty-seven on the thirteenth of next month, which I believe is July, and he is a great deal more grizzled than my father, who is past fifty. He is very particular about all sorts of things, as I suppose he has to be, as he is a Colonel of infantry. Nobody could possibly disapprove of my present performances more than he would.' I could not help ejaculating, 'Why, then, do you marry him?' She smiled at my earnestness. 'Oh, that is all arranged,' she said, 'and I have nothing to do with it. I have known for more than a year that I'm to marry Colonel Kaldhein, but I cannot say that I have given myself much concern about it until recently. It now occurs to me that if I expect to amuse myself in the way I best like I must lose no time doing so.' I looked at the girl with earnest interest. 'It appears to me,' said I, 'that your ways of amusing yourself are very much like mine.'—'That is true,' she said, looking up with animation, 'they are. Is it not delightful to be free, to go where you like, and do what you please, without any one to advise or interfere with you?'—'It is delightful,' said I; and for half an hour we sat and talked about these delights and kindred subjects. She was much interested in our castle, and urged me to make a sketch of it, so that she may know what it now looked like. She had seen it when a little girl, but never since, and had been afraid to wander very far in this direction by herself. I told her that it would be far better for her to see the castle with her own eyes, and that I could conduct her to an eminence, not half a mile away, where she could have an excellent view of it. This plan greatly pleased her; but looking at her watch she said that it would be too late for her to go that morning, but if I happened to come that way the next day, and she should be there to finish her sketch, she would be delighted to have me show her the eminence."

"I think," interrupted Aunt Martha, "that she was a very imprudent young woman."

"That may be," he replied, "but you must remember, madam, that up to this time the young lady had been subjected to the most conventional trammels, and that her young nature had just burst out into temporary freedom and

true life. It was the caged bird's flight into the bright summer air."

"Just the kind of birds," said Aunt Martha, "that shouldn't be allowed to fly, at least until they are used to it. But you can go on with your story."

"Well," said the young man, "the next day we met I took her to the piece of high ground I had mentioned, and she sketched the castle. After that we met again and again, nearly every day. This sort of story tells itself. I became madly in love with her, and I am sure she liked me very well; at all events I was a companion of her own age and tastes, and such a one, she assured me, she had never known before, and probably would never know again."

"There was some excuse for her," said Aunt Martha; "but still she had no right to act in that way, especially as she was so soon to be married."

"I do not think that she reasoned much upon the subject," said the young man, "and I am sure I did not. We made no plans. Every day we thought only of what we were doing or saying, and not at all what we had done or would do. We were very happy.

"One morning I was sitting by Marie in the very place where I had first met her, when we heard some one rapidly approaching. Looking up I saw a tall man in military uniform. 'Heavens!' cried Marie, 'it is Colonel Kaldhein.'

"The situation was one of which an expectant bridegroom would not be likely to ask many questions. Marie was seated on a low stone with her drawing-block in her lap. She was finishing the sketch on which she was engaged when I first saw her, and I was kneeling close to her, looking over her work and making various suggestions, and I think my countenance must have indicated that I found it very pleasant to make suggestions in that way to such a pretty girl. Our heads were very close together. Sometimes we looked at the paper, sometimes we looked at each other. But in the instant I caught sight of the Colonel the situation had changed. I rose to my feet, and Marie began to pick up the drawing materials, which were lying about her.

"Colonel Kaldhein came forward almost at a run. His eyes blazed through his gold spectacles, and his close-cut

reddish beard seemed to be singeing with the fires of rage. I had but an instant for observation, for he came directly up to me, and with a tremendous objurgation he struck me full in the face with such force that the blow stretched me upon the ground.

"I was almost stunned; but I heard a scream from Marie, a storm of angry words from Kaldhein, and I felt sure he was about to inflict further injury. He was a much stronger man than I was, and probably was armed. With a sudden instinct of self-preservation I rolled down a little declivity on the edge of which I had fallen, and staggering to my feet, plunged into a thicket and fled. Even had I been in the full possession of my senses, I knew that under the circumstances I would have been of no benefit to Marie had I remained upon the scene. The last thing I heard was a shout from Kaldhein, in which he declared that he would kill me yet. For some days I did not go out of my castle. My face was bruised, my soul was dejected. I knew there was no possible chance that I should meet Marie, and that there was a chance that I might meet the angry Colonel. An altercation at this time would be very annoying and painful to the lady, no matter what the result, and I considered it my duty to do everything that was possible to avoid a meeting with Kaldhein. Therefore, as I have said, I shut myself up within the walls of old Wulrick, and gave strict orders to my servants to admit no one.

"It was at this time that the strangest events of my life occurred. Sitting in an upper room, gazing out of the window, over the fields, through which I had walked so happily but two days before to meet the lady whom I had begun to think of as my Marie, I felt the head of a dog laid gently in my lap. Without turning my head I caressed the animal, and stroked the long hair on his neck.

"My hound Ajax was a dear companion to me in this old castle, although I never took him in my walks, as he was apt to get into mischief, and when I turned my head to look at him he was gone; but strange to say, the hand which had been stroking the dog felt as if it were still resting on his neck.

"Quickly drawing my hand toward me it struck the head

of the dog, and, moving it backward and forward, I felt the ears and nose of the animal, and then became conscious that its head was still resting upon my knee.

"I started back. Had I been stricken with blindness? But no; turning my head, I could plainly see everything in the room. The scene from the window was as distinct as it ever had been. I sprang to my feet, and, as I stood wondering what this strange thing could mean, the dog brushed up against me and licked my hand. Then the idea suddenly flashed into my mind that by some occult influence Ajax had been rendered invisible.

"I dashed downstairs, and although I could neither see nor hear it, I felt that the dog was following me. Rushing into the open air, I saw one of my men. 'Where's Ajax?' I cried. 'A very strange thing has happened, sir,' he said, 'and I should have come to tell you of it, had I not been unwilling to disturb your studies. About two hours ago Ajax was lying here in the courtyard; suddenly he sprang to his feet with a savage growl. His hair stood straight upon his back, his tail was stiff, and his lips were drawn back, showing his great teeth. I turned to see what had enraged him, but there was absolutely nothing, sir—nothing in the world. And never did I see Ajax so angry. But this lasted only for an instant. Ajax suddenly backed, his tail dropped between his legs, his head hung down, and with a dreadful howl he turned, and, leaping the wall of the courtyard, he disappeared. I have since been watching for his return. The gate is open, and as soon as he enters I shall chain him, for I fear the dog is mad.'

"I did not dare to utter the thoughts that were in my mind, but, bidding the man inform me the moment Ajax returned, I re-entered the castle and sat down in the great hall.

"The dog was beside me; his head again lay upon my knees. With a feeling of awe, yet strangely enough without fear, I carefully passed my hand over the animal's head. I felt his ears, his nose, his jaws, and his neck. They were not the head, the ears, the nose, the jaws, or the neck of Ajax!

"I had heard of animals, and even human beings, who were totally invisible, but who still retained their form, their

palpability, and all the powers and functions of life. I had heard of houses haunted by invisible animals; I had read De Kay's story of the maiden Manmat'ha, whose coming her lover perceived by the parting of the tall grain in the field of ripe wheat through which she passed, but whose form, although it might be folded in his arms, was yet as invisible to his sight as the summer air. I did not doubt for a moment that the animal that had come to me was one of those strange beings. I lifted his head; it was heavy. I took hold of a paw which he readily gave me; he had every attribute of a real dog, except that he could not be seen."

"I call that perfectly horrible," said Aunt Martha with a sort of a gasp.

"Perhaps," said the young man, "you would prefer that I should not continue."

At this both my wife and Aunt Martha declared that he must go on, and even I did not object to hearing the rest of the story.

"Well," said the young man, "Ajax never came back. It is generally believed that dogs can see things which are invisible to us, and I am afraid that my faithful hound was frightened, perhaps to death, when he found that the animal whose entrance into the courtyard he had perceived was a supernatural thing.

"But if I needed a canine companion I had one, for by day or night this invisible dog never left me. When I slept he lay on the floor by the side of my bed; if I put down my hand I could always feel his head, and often he would stand up and press his nose against me, as if to assure me that he was there. This strange companionship continued for several days, and I became really attached to the invisible animal. His constant companionship seemed to indicate that he had come to guard me, and that he was determined to do it thoroughly. I felt so much confidence in his protection, although I knew not how it could be exerted, that one morning I decided to take a walk, and with my hand on the head of the dog, to make sure that he was with me, I strolled into the open country.

"I had walked about a mile, and was approaching a group of large trees, when suddenly from behind one of them the

tall figure of a man appeared. In an instant I knew it to be Colonel Kaldhein; his was a face which could not easily be forgotten. Without a word he raised a pistol which he held in his hand and fired at me. The ball whistled over my head.

"I stopped short, startled, and frightened almost out of my senses. I was unarmed, and had no place of refuge. It was plain that the man was determined to kill me.

"Quickly recocking his pistol, Kaldhein raised it again. I involuntarily shrank back, expecting death; but before he could fire his arm suddenly dropped, and the pistol was discharged into the ground. Then began a strange scene. The man shouted, kicked, and beat up and down with his arms; his pistol fell from his hand, he sprang from side to side, he turned around, he struggled and yelled.

"I stood astounded. For an instant I supposed the man had been overtaken by some sort of fit; but in a flash the truth came to me—Kaldhein was being attacked by my protector, the invisible dog.

"Horrified by this conviction, my first impulse was to save the man; and, without knowing what I was going to do, I stepped quickly toward him, but stumbling over something I did not see I fell sprawling. Before I could regain my feet I saw Kaldhein fall backward to the ground, where a scene took place, so terrible that I shall not attempt to describe it. When, with trembling steps, I approached, the man was dead. The invisible dog had almost torn him to pieces.

"I could do nothing. I did not remain upon the spot another minute, but hurried home to the castle. As I rapidly walked on I felt the dog beside me, and, putting my hand upon him, I felt that he was panting terribly. For three days I did not leave the house.

"About the end of this time I was sitting in an upper room of the castle, reflecting upon the recent dreadful event, when the thought struck me that the invisible dog, who was by my side, apparently asleep, must be of an unusually powerful build to overcome so easily such a strong man as Kaldhein. I felt a desire to know how large the creature really was, and, as I had never touched any portion of his body

back of his shoulders, I now passed my hand along his back. I was amazed at his length, and when I had moved my hand at least seven feet from his head it still rested upon his body. And then the form of that body began to change in a manner which terrified me; but impelled by a horrible but irresistible curiosity, my hand moved on.

"But I no longer touched the body of a dog; the form beneath my hand was cylindrical, apparently about a foot in diameter. As my hand moved on the diameter diminished, and the skin of the creature became cold and clammy. I was feeling the body of a snake!

"I now had reached the open door of the room. The body of the snake extended through it. It went on to the top of the stairs; these I began to descend, my heart beating fast with terror, my face blanched, I am sure, but my hand still moving along the body of the awful creature. I had studied zoology, giving a good deal of attention to reptiles, and I knew that, judged by the ordinary ratio of diminution of the bodies of serpents, this one must extend a long distance down the stairs.

"But I had not descended more than a dozen steps before I felt a shiver beneath my hand, and then a jerk, and the next moment the snake's body was violently drawn upward. I withdrew my hand and started to one side, and then, how, I know not, I became aware that the dog part of the creature was coming downstairs.

"I now became possessed by a wild terror. The creature must be furious that I had discovered his real form. He had always been careful to keep his head toward me. I should be torn to pieces as Kaldhein had been! Down the stairs I dashed, across the courtyard, and toward a lofty old tower, which stood in one corner of the castle. I ran up the winding stairs of this with a speed which belongs only to a frantically terrified creature, until I reached the fourth story, where I dashed through an open doorway, slammed behind me an iron door, which shut with a spring, and fell gasping upon the floor.

"In less than a minute I was aware, by a slight rattling of the grate-hinges, that something was pushing against the door; but I did not move. I knew that I was safe. The

room in which I lay was a prison dungeon, and in it, in the olden times, it is said, men had been left to perish. Escape or communication with the outer world was impossible. A little light and air came through a narrow slit in the wall, and the door could not be forced.

"I knew that the invisible dog, or whatever it was, could not get in unless the door was open. I had frequently noticed that when he entered a room it was through an open door, and I sometimes knew of his approach by seeing an unlatched door open without visible cause; so, feeling secure for the present, I lay and gasped and panted.

"After the lapse of a few hours, however, I was seized by a new terror. How was I ever to get out of this horrible dungeon? Even if I made up my mind to face the dog, trusting that he had recovered from his momentary anger, I had no means of opening the door, and as to making any one hear me I knew that was impossible.

"I had no hope that my servants would seek me here. I had not seen any one when I ran into the tower, and if they should discover that I was in this dungeon, how could they open the door? The key was in my father's possession. He had taken it to Vienna to exhibit it as a curiosity to some of his mechanical friends. He believed that there was not such another key in the world. I was in the habit of making long absences from the castle, and if I should be looked for I believed that the tower would be the last place visited.

"Night came on; the little light in the room vanished, and, hungry, thirsty, and almost hopeless, I fell asleep.

"During the night there was a most dreadful storm. The thunder roared, the lightning flashed through the slit in the wall, and the wind blew with such terrific violence that the tower shook and trembled. After a time I heard a tremendous crash as of falling walls, and then another, and now I felt the wind blowing into my prison.

"There was no further sleep for me. Trembling with a fearful apprehension of what might happen next, I cowered against the wall until the day broke, and then I perceived that in front of me was a great hole in the wall of the dungeon, which extended for more than a yard above the floor. I sat and gazed at this until the light became stronger,

and then I cautiously approached the aperture and looked out. Nearly the whole of the castle lay in ruins before me!

"It was easy to see what had happened. The storm had demolished the crumbling walls of the old building, and the tower, itself frail and tottering, stood alone, high above the prostrate ruins. If the winds should again arise it must fall, and at any moment its shaken foundations might give way beneath it.

"Through the hole in the wall, which had been caused by the tearing away of some of the connection between the tower and main building, I could look down on the ground below, covered with masses of jagged stone; but there was no way in which I could get down. I could not descend that perpendicular wall. If I leaped out, death would be certain.

"As I crouched at the opening I felt the head of a dog pushed against me. A spasm of terror ran through me, but the moment the creature began to lick my hands I knew that I had nothing to fear from him. Instantly my courage returned. I felt that he was my protector. I patted his head and he renewed his caresses.

"Passing my hand over him, I found he was holding himself in his present position by means of his forelegs, which were stretched out upon the floor. What a dog this must be, who could climb a wall! But I gave no time to conjectures of this sort. How could I avail myself of his assistance? In what manner could he enable me to escape from that dangerous tower?

"Suddenly a thought came to me. I remembered the snake part of him. Judging from the ratio of diminution, which I have mentioned before, that part, if hanging down, must reach nearly, if not quite, to the ground. By taking advantage of this means of descent I might be saved, but the feat would require dexterity and an immense amount of faith. This serpent-like portion of the animal was invisible. How could I know how long it was!

"But there was no time for consideration; the wind had again arisen, and was blowing with fury. The tower shook beneath me; at any moment it might fall. If I should again escape from death, through the assistance of my invisible friend, I must avail myself of that assistance instantly.

"I stopped and felt the animal. He still hung by part of his body and by his forelegs to the floor of the dungeon, and by reaching out I could feel that the rest of him extended downward. I therefore seized his body in my arms, threw myself out of the aperture, and began to slide down.

"In a very short time I found that I had reached the snake portion of the creature, and, throwing my arms and legs around it, I endeavored with all my strength to prevent a too rapid descent; but in spite of all my efforts, my downward progress was faster than I would have wished it to be. But there was no stopping; I must slip down.

"In these moments of rapid descent my mind was filled with wild anxiety concerning the serpent-like form to which I was clinging. I remembered in a flash that there were snakes whose caudal extremity dwindled away suddenly into a point. This one might do so, and at any instant I might come to the end of the tail and drop upon the jagged stones below.

"Calculation after calculation of the ratio of diminution flashed through my mind during that awful descent. My whole soul was centered upon one point. When would this support end? When would I drop?

"Fortunately I was on the leeward side of the tower, and I was not swung about by the wind. Steadily I descended, and steadily the diameter of the form I grasped diminished; soon I could grasp it in my hand; then with a terrified glance I looked below. I was still at a sickening distance from the ground. I shut my eyes. I slipped down, down, down. The tail became like a thick rope which I encircled with each hand. It became thinner and thinner. It grew so small that I could not hold it; but as I felt it slip from my fingers my feet rested on a pile of stones.

"Bewildered and almost exhausted, I stumbled over the ruins, gained the unencumbered ground, and ran as far from the tower as I could, sinking down at last against the trunk of a tree in a neighboring field. Scarcely had I reached this spot when the fury of the wind-storm appeared to redouble, and before the wild and shrieking blast the tower bent and then fell with a crash upon the other ruins.

"The first thought that came into my mind when I beheld

the dreadful spectacle concerned the creature who had twice saved my life. Had he escaped, or was he crushed beneath that mass of stone? I felt on either side to discover if he were near me, but he was not. Had he given his life for mine?

"Had I been stronger I would have searched for him; I would have clambered among the ruins to see if I could discover his mangled form. If I could but reach his faithful head I would stroke and caress it, living or dead. But excitement, fatigue, and want of food had made me so weak that I could do nothing but sit upon the ground with my back against the tree.

"While thus resting I perceived that the whole of the tower had not been demolished by the storm. Some of the rooms in which we had lived, having been built at a later date than the rest of the great edifice, had resisted the power of the wind and were still standing.

"From the direction of the uninjured portion of the castle I now saw approaching a light-colored object, which seemed to be floating in the air about a foot from the ground. As it came nearer I saw that it was a basket, and I immediately understood the situation. My faithful friend was alive, and was bringing me some refreshments.

"On came the basket, rising and falling with the bounds of the dog. It was truly an odd spectacle, but a very welcome one. In a few moments the basket was deposited at my side, and I was caressing the head of the faithful dog. In the basket I found a bottle of wine and some bread and meat, which the good creature had doubtless discovered in the kitchen of the castle, and it was not long before I was myself again. The storm had now almost passed away, and I arose and went to my own rooms, my friend and protector still keeping close to my side.

"On the morning of the next day, as I sat wondering what had happened to my servants, and whether my father had been apprised of the disaster to the castle, I felt something pulling at the skirt of my coat. I put out my hand and found that it was the invisible dog. Imagining that he wished me to follow him, I arose, and, obeying the impulse given me by his gentle strain upon my coat, I followed him

out of the door, across the courtyard, and into the open country. We went on for a considerable distance. A gentle touch of my coat admonished me when I turned from the direction in which it was desired that I should go.

"After a walk of about half an hour I approached a great oak-tree, with low, wide-spreading branches. Some one was sitting beneath it. Imagining the truth, I rushed forward. It was Marie!

"It was needless for us to say anything, to explain the state of our feelings toward each other. That tale was told by the delight with which we met. When I asked her how she came to be there, she told me that about an hour before, while sitting in front of her father's mansion, she had felt something gently pulling at her skirts; and, although at first frightened, she was at length impelled to obey the impulse, and, without knowing whether it was the wind or some supernatural force which had led her here, she had come.

"We had a great deal to say to each other. She told me that she had been longing to send me a message to warn me that Colonel Kaldhein would certainly kill me the next time he saw me; but she had no means of sending me such a message, for the Colonel had had her actions closely watched.

"When the news came of Kaldhein's death she at first feared that I had killed him, and would therefore be obliged to fly the country; but when it was known that he had been almost torn to pieces by wild beasts, she, like every one else, was utterly amazed, and could not understand the matter at all. None but the most ferocious creatures could have inflicted the injuries of which the man had died, and where those creatures came from no one knew. Some people thought that a pack of blood-hounds might have broken loose from some of the estates of the surrounding country, and, in the course of their wild journeyings, might have met with the Colonel, and fallen upon him. Others surmised that a bear had come down from the mountains; but the fact was that nobody knew anything about it.

"I did not attempt to acquaint Marie with the truth. At that moment the invisible dog was lying at my side, and I feared if I mentioned his existence to Marie she might fly in terror. To me there was only one important phase of the

affair, and that was that Marie was now free, that she might be mine.

"Before we parted we were affianced lovers, pledged to marry as soon as possible. I wrote to my father, asking for his permission to wed the lady. But in his reply he utterly forbade any such marriage. Marie also discovered that her parents would not permit a union with a foreigner, and would indeed oppose her marriage with any one at this time.

"However, as usual, love triumphed, and after surmounting many difficulties we were married and fled to America. Since that time I have been obliged to support myself and my wife, for my father will give me no assistance. He had proposed a very different career for me, and was extremely angry when he found his plans had been completely destroyed. But we are hopeful, we work hard, and hope that we may yet be able to support ourselves comfortably without aid from any one. We are young, we are strong, we trust each other, and have a firm faith in our success.

"I had only one regret in leaving Europe, and that was that my faithful friend, the noble and devoted invisible dog, was obliged to remain on the other side of the Atlantic. Why this was so I do not know, but perhaps it was for the best. I never told my wife of his existence, and if she had accidentally discovered it, I know not what might have been the effects upon her nervous system.

"The dog accompanied me through Austria, Switzerland, and France to Havre, from which port we sailed. I took leave of him on the gang-plank. He licked my hands, and I caressed and stroked him. People might have thought that my actions denoted insanity, but every one was so greatly occupied in these last moments before departure, that perhaps I was not noticed. Just as I left him and hastened on board, a sailor fell overboard from the gang-plank. He was quickly rescued, but could not imagine why he had fallen. I believe, however, that he was tripped up by the snake part of my friend as he convulsively rushed away."

The young man ceased, and gazed pensively upon the floor.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Aunt Martha, "if those are the sort of experiences you had, I don't wonder that Realism

was wonderful enough for you. The invisible creature was very good to you, I am sure, but I am glad it did not come with you to America."

David, who had been waiting for an opportunity to speak, now interrupted further comments by stating that it was daylight, and if I thought well of it, he would open the window-shutters, so that we might see any one going toward the town. A milkman, he said, passed the house very early every morning. When the shutters were opened we were all amazed that the night should have passed so quickly.

The tall burglar and the young man now began to exhibit a good deal of anxiety.

"I should like very much to know," said the former, "what you intend to do in regard to us. It cannot be that you think of placing that young gentleman and myself in the hands of the law. Of course, this man," pointing to the stout burglar, "cannot expect anything but a just punishment of his crimes; but after what we have told you, you must certainly be convinced that our connection with the affair is entirely blameless, and should be considered as a piece of very bad luck."

"That," said I, "is a matter which will receive all the consideration it needs."

At this moment David announced the milkman. Counseling my man to keep strict guard over the prisoners, I went out to the road, stopped the milkman, and gave him a message which I was certain would insure the prompt arrival at my house of sufficient force to take safe charge of the burglars. Excited with the importance of the commission, he whipped up his horse and dashed away.

When I returned to the house I besought my wife and Aunt Martha to go to bed, that they might yet get some hours of sleep; but both refused. They did not feel in the least like sleep, and there was a subject on which they wished to consult with me in the dining-room.

"Now," said Aunt Martha, when the door had been closed, "these men have freely told us their stories; whether they are entirely true or not, must, of course, be a matter of opinion; but they have laid their cases before us, and we should not place them all in the hands of the officers of the

law without giving them due consideration, and arriving at a decision which shall be satisfactory to ourselves."

"Let us take them in order," said I. "What do you think of the tall man's case?"

"I think he is a thief and manufacturer of falsehoods," said my wife promptly.

"I am afraid," said Aunt Martha, "that he is not altogether innocent; but there is one thing greatly in his favor —when he told of the feelings which overcame him when he saw that little child sleeping peacefully in its bed in the house which he had unintentionally robbed, I felt there must be good points in that man's nature. What do you think of him?"

"I think he is worst of the lot," I answered, "and as there are now two votes against him, he must go to the lock-up. And now what of the stout fellow?" I asked.

"Oh, he is a burglar by his own confession," said my wife; "there can be no doubt of that."

"I am afraid you are right," said Aunt Martha.

"I know she is," said I, "and James Barlow, or whatever his name may be, shall be delivered to the constable."

"Of course, there can be no difference of opinion in regard to the young man," said Aunt Martha quickly. "Both the others admitted that he had nothing to do with this affair except as a journalist, and although I do not think he ought to get his realistic ideas in that way, I would consider it positively wicked to send him into court in company with those other men. Consider the position in which he would be placed before the world. Consider his young wife."

"I cannot say," said my wife, "that I am inclined to believe all parts of his story."

"I suppose," said I, laughing, "that you particularly refer to the invisible dog-snake."

"I'm not so sure about all that," she answered. "Since the labors of the psychic researchers began, we have heard of a great many strange things; but it is evident that he is a young man of education and culture, and in all probability a journalist or literary man. I do not think he should be sent to the lock-up with common criminals."

"There!" cried Aunt Martha, "two in his favor. He must

be released. It's a poor rule that does not work both ways."

I stood for a few moments undecided. If left to myself, I would have sent the trio to the county town, where, if any one of them could prove his innocence, he could do so before the constitutional authorities; but having submitted the matter to my wife and aunt, I could not well override their decision. As for what the young man said, I gave it no weight whatever, for of course he would say the best he could for himself. But the testimony of the others had weight. When they both declared that he was not a burglar, but merely a journalist, engaged in what he supposed to be his duty, it would seem to be a cruel thing to stamp him as a criminal by putting him in charge of the constables.

But my indecision soon came to an end, for Aunt Martha declared that no time should be lost in setting the young man free, for should the people in town arrive and see him sitting bound with the others it would ruin his character forever. My wife agreed.

"Whatever there may be of truth in his story," she said, "one of two things is certain—either he has had most wonderful experiences out of which he may construct realistic novels which will give him fortune and reputation, or he has a startling imagination, which, if used in the production of works in the romantic school, will be of the same advantage to his future. Looking upon it, even in this light and without any reference to his family and the possible effects on his own moral nature, we shall assume a great responsibility in deliberately subjecting such a person to criminal prosecution and perhaps conviction."

This was enough. "Well," said I, "we will release the young fellow and send the two other rascals to jail."

"That was not well expressed," said my wife, "but we will not criticize words at present."

We returned to the library and I announced my decision. When he heard it the stout burglar exhibited no emotion. His expression indicated that, having been caught, he expected to be sent to jail, and that was the end of it. Perhaps he had been through this experience so often that he had become used to it. The tall man, however, took the an-

nouncement in a very different way. His face grew dark and his eyes glittered. "You are making a great mistake," he said to me, "a very great mistake, and you will have to bear the consequences."

"Very good," said I, "I will remember that remark when your trial comes on."

The behavior of the young man was unexceptional. He looked upon us with a face full of happy gratitude, and, as he thanked us for the kind favor and the justice which we had shown him, his eyes seemed dim with tears. Aunt Martha was much affected.

"I wonder if his mother is living," she whispered to me. "A wife is a great deal, but a mother is more. If I had thought of her sooner I would have spoken more strongly in his favor. And now you should untie him at once and let him go home. His wife must be getting terribly anxious."

The young man overheard this last remark.

"You will confer a great favor on me, sir," he said, "if you will let me depart as soon as possible. I feel a great repugnance to be seen in company with these men, as you may imagine, from wearing a mask on coming here. If I leave immediately I think I can catch the first train from your station."

I considered the situation. If I did what I was asked, there would be two bound burglars to guard, three women and a child to protect, an uncertain stranger at liberty, and only David and myself to attend to the whole business. "No, sir," said I, "I shall not untie you until the officers I sent for are near at hand; then I will release you, and you can leave the house by the back way without being seen by them. There are other morning trains which will take you into the city early enough."

"I think you are a little hard on him," remarked Aunt Martha, but the young man made no complaint.

"I will trust myself to you, sir," he said.

The officers arrived much sooner than I expected. There were five of them, including the Chief of Police, and they were accompanied by several volunteer assistants, among whom was the milkman who had been my messenger. This morning his customers might wait for their milk, for all

business must give way before such an important piece of sightseeing as this.

I had barely time to untie the young man and take him to the back of the house before the officers and their followers had entered the front door. There was now a great deal of questioning, a great deal of explanation, a great deal of discussion as to whether my way of catching burglars was advisable or not, and a good deal of talk about the best method of taking the men to town. Some of the officers were in favor of releasing the two men, and then deciding in what manner they should be taken to town; and if this plan had been adopted, I believe that these two alert and practical rascals would have taken themselves out of my house without the assistance of the officers, or at least would have caused a great deal of trouble and perhaps injury in endeavoring to do so.

But the Chief of Police was of my mind, and before the men were entirely released from the ropes by which I had tied them, they were securely manacled.

A requisition made on David and myself to appear as witnesses, the two men were taken from the house to the wagons in which the officers and their followers had come. My wife and Aunt Martha had gone upstairs before the arrival of the police, and were watching the outside proceeding from a window.

Standing in the hallway, I glanced into the dining-room, and was surprised to see the young man still standing by a side door. I had thought him gone, but perhaps it was wise in him to remain, and not show himself upon the road until the coast was entirely clear. He did not see me, and was looking backward into the kitchen, a cheerful and animated expression upon his face. This expression did not strike me pleasantly. He had escaped a great danger, it was true, but it was no reason for this rather obtrusive air of exultation. Just then Alice came into the dining-room from the kitchen, and the young man stepped back, so that she did not notice him. As she passed he gently threw his arm quietly around her neck and kissed her.

At that very instant, even before the girl had time to exclaim, in rushed David from the outer side door.

"I've been watching you, you rascal," he shouted; "you're done for now!" and he threw his strong arms around the man, pinioning his arms to his side.

The young fellow gave a great jerk, and began to struggle powerfully. His face turned black with rage; he swore, he kicked. He made the most frenzied efforts to free himself, but David's arms were strong, his soul was full of jealous fury, and in a moment I had come to his assistance. Each of us taking the young fellow by an arm, we ran him into the hallway and out of the front door, Alice aiding us greatly by putting her hands against the man's back and pushing most forcibly.

"Here's another one," cried David. "I'll appear against him. He's the worst of the lot."

Without knowing what it all meant, the Chief clapped the nippers on our prisoner, justly believing that if burglars were about to show themselves so unexpectedly, the best thing to do was to handcuff them as fast as they appeared, and then to ask questions. The reasons for not having produced this man before, and for producing him now, were not very satisfactory to the officer.

"Have you any more in the cellar?" he asked. "If so, I should like to take a look at them before I start away."

At this moment Aunt Martha made her appearance at the front door.

"What are you going to do with that young man?" she asked sharply. "What right have you to put irons upon him?"

"Aunt Martha," said I, stepping back to her, "what do you think he has done?"

"I don't know," said she; "how should I know? All I know is that we agreed to set him free."

I addressed her solemnly: "David and I believe him to be utterly depraved. He availed himself of the first moments of his liberation to kiss Alice." Aunt Martha looked at me with wide-open eyes, and then her brows contracted.

"He did, did he?" said she. "And that is the kind of a man he is. Very good. Let him go to jail with the others. I don't believe one word about his young wife. If kissing respectable young women is the way he studies Realism the

quicker he goes to jail the better," and with that she walked into the house.

When the men had been placed in the two vehicles in which the police had come, the Chief and I made an examination of the premises, and we found that the house had been entered by a kitchen window, in exactly the manner which the tall burglar had described. Outside of this window, close to the wall, we found a leathern bag, containing what the Chief declared to be an excellent assortment of burglars' tools. The officers and their prisoners now drove away, and we were left to a long morning nap, if we were so fortunate as to get it, and a late breakfast.

In the course of the trial of the three men who had entered my house some interesting points in regard to them were brought out. Several detectives and policemen from New York were present, and their testimony proved that my three burglars were men of eminence in their profession, and that which most puzzled the metropolitan detectives was to discover why these men should have been willing to devote their high talents to the comparatively insignificant business of breaking into a suburban dwelling.

The tall man occupied a position of peculiar eminence in criminal circles. He was what might be called a criminal manager. He would take contracts for the successful execution of certain crimes—bank robberies, for instance—and while seldom taking part in the actual work of a burglary or similar operation, he would plan all the details of the affair, and select and direct his agents with great skill and judgment. He had never been arrested before, and the detectives were delighted, believing they would now have an opportunity of tracing to him a series of very important criminal operations that had taken place in New York and some other large cities. He was known as Lewis Mandit, and this was believed to be his real name.

The stout man was a first-class professional burglar and nothing more, and was in the employ of Mandit. The young man was a decidedly uncommon personage. He was of a good family, had been educated at one of our principal colleges, had traveled, and was in every way qualified to make a figure in society. He had been a newspaper man, and a

writer for leading periodicals, and had shown considerable literary ability; but a life of honest industry did not suit his tastes, and he had now adopted knavery as a regular profession.

This man, who was known among his present associates as Sparky, still showed himself occasionally in newspaper offices, and was generally supposed to be a correspondent for a Western journal; but his real business position was that of Mandit's head man.

Sparky was an expert in many branches of crime. He was an excellent forger, a skilful lock-picker, an ingenious planner of shady projects, and had given a great deal of earnest study to the subject of the loopholes of the law. He had a high reputation in criminal circles for his ability in getting his fellow-rascals out of jail. There was reason to believe that in the past year no less than nine men, some condemned to terms of imprisonment, and some held for trial, had escaped by means of assistance given them by Sparky.

His methods of giving help to jail-birds were various. Sometimes liberty was conferred through the agency of saws and ropes, at other times through that of a habeas corpus and an incontestible alibi. His means were adapted to the circumstances of the case, and it was believed that if Sparky could be induced to take up the case of a captured rogue, the man had better chance of finding himself free than the law had of keeping him behind bars, especially if his case were treated before it had passed into its more chronic stages.

Sparky's success was greatly due to his extremely specious manner, and his power of playing the part that the occasion demanded. In this particular he was even the superior of Mandit, who was an adept in this line. These two men found no difficulty in securing the services of proficient burglars, safe-robbers, and the like; for, in addition to the high rewards paid these men, they were in a manner insured against permanent imprisonment in case of misfortune. It was always arranged that, if any of their enterprises came to grief, and if either Mandit or Sparky should happen to be arrested, the working miscreants should substantiate any

story their superiors might choose to tell of themselves, and, if necessary, to take upon themselves the whole responsibility of the crime. In this case their speedy release was to be looked upon as assured.

A great deal of evidence in regard to the character and practices of these two men came from the stout burglar, commonly known as Barney Fitch. When he found that nothing was to be expected from his two astute employers, and that they were in as bad a place as himself, he promptly turned State's evidence, and told all that he knew about them.

It was through the testimony of this man that the motive for the attempted robbery of my house was found out. It had no connection whatever with the other burglaries of our neighborhood, those, probably, having been committed by low-class thieves, who had not broken into my house simply because my doors and windows had been so well secured; nor had our boy, George William, any share whatever in the protection of the household.

The burglary was undertaken solely for the purpose of getting possession of some important law papers, which were to be used in a case in which I was concerned, which soon would be tried. If these papers could be secured by the opposite party, the side on which I was engaged would have no case at all, and a suit involving a great deal of property must drop. With this end in view the unscrupulous defendants in the case had employed Mandit to procure the papers; and that astute criminal manager had not only arranged all the details of the affair, but had gone himself to the scene of action in order to see that there should be no mistake in carrying out the details of this most important piece of busines.

The premises had been thoroughly reconnoitred by Sparky, who, a few days before the time fixed for the burglary, had visited my house in the capacity of an agent of a telescopic bookcase, which could be extended as new volumes were required, therefore need never exhibit empty shelves. The young man had been included in the party on account of his familiarity with legal documents, it being, of course, of paramount importance that the right papers should be se-

cured. His ingenuity was also to be used to cover up, if possible, all evidence that the house had been entered at all, it being desirable to make it appear to the court that I had never had these documents in my possession, and that they never existed.

Had it not been for a very natural desire for refreshment that interfered with their admirably laid plans, it is probable that the mechanical skill of Mandit would have been equal to the noiseless straightening of the bent bolt, and the obliteration of the scratches and dents made by the attempts upon other shutters, and that Sparky, after relocking all open desks or cabinets, and after the exit of the others, would have closed and fastened the kitchen shutters, and would then have left the house by means of an open window in the upper hall and the roof of a piazza.

Thus it was that these three men, so eminent in their different spheres of earnest endeavor, came to visit my comparatively humble abode; and thus it was that they not only came to that abode, but to the deepest grief. They were "wanted" in so many quarters, and on so many charges, that before they had finished serving out their various sentences their ability to wickedly avail themselves of the property of others would have suffered greatly from disuse, and the period of life left them for the further exercise of those abilities would be inconveniently limited.

I was assured by a prominent detective that it had been a long time since two such dangerous criminals as Mandit and Sparky had fallen into the hands of the law. These men, by means of very competent outside assistance, made a stout fight for acquittal on some of the charges brought against them; but when they found that further effort of this kind would be unavailing, and that they would be sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, they threw off their masks of outraged probity and stood out in their true characters of violent and brutal ruffians. Barney Fitch, the cracksman, was a senior warden compared to them.

It was a long time before my Aunt Martha recovered from her disappointment in regard to the youngest burglar.

"Of course I was mistaken," she said. "That sort of thing will happen; but I really had good grounds for believing him

to be a truthful person, so I am not ashamed for having taken him for what he said he was. I have now no doubt before he fell in his wicked ways that he was a very good writer, and might have become a novelist or a magazine author; but his case is a very sad proof that the study of Realism may be carried too far," and she heaved a sigh.

A Suspicious Character

BY WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE

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CHAPTER I

A NEGRO porter passed through the car making his announcement in stentorian tones, tempered, however, by his expectant civility and servility, for his train was the three-thirty p. m. express from Wall Street to the shore.

"Ravenswood," he cried, "all out for Ravenswood by the Sea!"

His car was the Vashti, and in seat 9 of that car there sat a man who for an hour had been staring absent-mindedly, perhaps dejectedly, at the swiftly moving scenery. He was young, this man, and tall and lithe, and well looking. But a strange pallor was upon his face; his countenance was marked with lines of fatigue. He suffered, evidently from jaded nerves.

As the porter reached him, this young man came suddenly to himself, sprang to his feet, with one hand reached for his finely woven Panama in the rack above, and with the other grabbed the porter.

"Ravenswood," he cried, "this is my stop, porter?" It was indeed a question and not a statement of a fact. Immediately the porter shook his head.

"Not *youah* stop, sir, Elsmere—next station—is youah stop."

The young man sank back into his seat listlessly. He drew his hand wearily across his face.

"Almost forgot where I'm bound for," he explained to the next passenger, in a confused, embarrassed way. He toyed nervously with his Panama, as though uncertain whether to replace it once more in the rack, or to hold it, preparatory to

alighting at Elsmere. All this time the long train had been coming to a stop. Now it was stationary before a small, artistic station, practically deserted save for a rickety stage, and a huge, throbbing, steel-blue motor car. The young man in seat 9 glanced at the small depot, at the rickety stage, at the car—

Then his heart leaped into his mouth. For suddenly his glance had lighted upon the girl in the car. He leaped forward on the instant, gripping his chair with both hands and staring at her as though completely fascinated, drinking in the glory of her face.

"It is she," he said softly to himself. He waited for an imperceptible space of time and suddenly the girl looked at him—looked him full in the face.

"*She*—and no mistake," he murmured. He jammed his hat well down upon his head, seized his heavy Gladstone bag, and tore down the aisle toward the only open door.

"All aboard," sang out the porter at the end, and the train began to move.

"Hold on there," cried the passenger, don't shut that door. This *is* my station, after all. I've got to get out."

By the time he reached the platform, the train had picked up considerable speed, and the porter tried to detain him, but without success. He jerked himself away, swung free, and dashed down the steps.

"Lawdy, boss," yelled the porter, "look out—they's another train a-comin'—another train."

But the passenger never heard. Once on terra firma, he forgot that trains existed. He sought and found the face—the girl he was looking for, and as a mariner steers by a fixed star, so did the lithe young man follow his straight course across three sets of railroad tracks, toward the steel-blue car. In his ears, it is true, he heard the porter's warning:

"— th' *other* train, boss, on th' *up* track. Lawsy. Look out."

But he heard it only with his ears. The warning did not sink in. He did not realize that upon one of the three tracks which he was crossing, an express, bound cityward, was

pounding its way at the rate of sixty miles an hour, coming nearer to him every instant, threatening him with instant destruction. He did not see it, did not hear it. The porter's warning droned away in the distance. And the passenger kept on—kept on, gladly realizing that his intuition had been correct, that the girl was lovelier every step he took. He had hoped, somehow to hold her gaze. But she had turned her head and was glancing intently at something to his left. He followed her glance, and his eye lighted upon three well dressed men, also crossing the tracks—men who seemed to have dropped from the clouds. These three men were bearing down upon him, following the porter's tactics, waving their arms and shouting violently.

"Express—express," they yelled.

The foremost of these three well dressed men made a sudden dash toward the tall young passenger, as one who would rescue him at the risk of his own life, but the young passenger merely held to his course, his glance returning to the girl.

She was looking at him now, and upon her face there was a look of horror. She saw, then, what he had refused to see, the imminent danger in which he was, and acting on the impulse of the moment, she rose in her car and beckoned to him to come, to come at once. His face lighted up, and he quickened his pace, and swung clear of the last steel rail.

Then with a roar like thunder, the meteor swept past him, almost sucking him into its mighty swirl. By some strange circumstance he had escaped where escape had seemed impossible. On the other side of the express three men fell back and, by common consent, they mopped their respective brows.

"Thunder," exclaimed one, the man who had dashed upon him—"I figured that we'd both be ground to mincemeat. Closest squeak I ever had, I tell you."

But the object of their solicitude gave no sign of their nervousness. Gladstone in hand, he swarmed up the terraced bank, and strode softly to the side of the car. He removed his hat and bowed to the girl.

"You beckoned to me—and I came," he stammered, in con-

fusion. The girl was hiding her face in her hands and quivering hysterically.

She turned her scared face toward him. "You were in—such terrible danger," she cried, "I had to—do something."

For the first time he looked at the express as it dashed into the distance, and for the first time he realized the situation. Instinctively he held out his hand—an act in which both he and she recognized as wholly without the conventions, but she, quite as impulsively, held out hers and permitted him to take it for an instant. There was silence—deep silence for a moment.

"You saved my life," he told her.

She shook her head. "I think you saved your own, by your coolness in keeping right on," she answered, "don't make a heroine of me. Besides, down there is a hero—he *risked* his life in trying to save you. I saw it all."

The young passenger started down the bank and met the three men as they came up. Gratefully he murmured his thanks to them, rebuking himself to them, for his stupidity and his blundering in getting into danger. The hero that the girl had pointed out, merely shrugged his shoulders and stated, unconcernedly, in a rather rough and ready tone that belied the Wall Street clothes he wore, that it was all in a lifetime and there was nothing to pay. Whereupon he of the Panama hat went back to the girl.

"Would you mind telling me," he asked, "where those chaps came from?"

She was cooler now—and colder, too. Civilly enough, she evinced a purpose to end the conversation but she answered him categorically.

"They jumped off your train," she told him. "It seemed to me, somehow, that they jumped because you got off."

"Do they belong here?" he queried. She shook her head, and turned to her chauffeur.

"You can go on, Henri," she exclaimed. "He's missed his train. He wont be down now until the five o'clock."

The chauffeur cranked his machine, and prepared to start. But the young man still detained him.

"One thing more," he asked of her, "can you direct me to the best hotel in Ravenswood?"

She nodded graciously enough, but kept her eyes upon the distances, as one who would discourage a conversation involuntarily begun.

"There is only one hotel," she answered, "the Ravenswood Inn. The stage will take you there."

Henri, the chauffeur, threw in the clutch, and she bowled away. The passenger strode to the stage, clambered in. The three unknowns were already ahead of him, clustered up in front near the driver, smoking black cigars and telling witty stories. The minute he had swung aboard, the driver lashed his horses, and the dilapidated conveyance, like some weather-beaten craft tossed on turbulent seas, lurched and staggered toward its destination.

The man with the Gladstone looked at the three men, but mused upon the girl.

"I wonder who she is," he asked himself, "and who is coming down upon the five o'clock."

As they teetered on, scraps of conversation from the three ahead, forced their way into his inner consciousness, and he found himself sizing up his three companions with considerable interest. At first blush, he had taken them for Wall Street men. But as he looked and listened, he realized his mistake. He knew Wall Street well, and he knew men well, and he knew, instinctively, that these men were not Wall Street men, and further, realized that they were masquerading—that they were not what they seemed. Besides, there was something familiar in their appearance—where had he seen them before? And then like a flash, it came to him.

"They were the three I brushed against in front of the Tombs to-day," he told himself.

But his speculations went no farther, for the seaside Jehu had brought his vehicle to a full stop under a ponderous *porte cochère,* and the tall young passenger found himself clambering awkwardly out.

"Ravenswood Inn, gents," said the driver, "an'—twenty cents apiece."

A uniformed attendant seized the Gladstone and deposited it within a discreet distance of the desk, giving the clerk some idea of the amount of luggage carried by the guest.

The clerk bowed to the young man, and nodded to the three who came behind.

"Together or separate?" he asked.

"I'm separate," smiled he of the Gladstone. He took the pen that the clerk handed him, leaned over the register and for the first time, hesitated before he wrote his name. His glance strayed toward his bag, and riveted itself upon two black letters that appeared upon its side: "O. P."

Then he turned back to the register and scribbled a signature: "Oscar Pearson, New York City," was what he wrote.

"Most of my baggage," he explained, "went on to Elsmere —booked for the Hotel Sandringham. Will you send and get it, please?"

The clerk nodded. "Glad to benefit by your change of mind, Mr.—er—Pearson," he exclaimed. The new guest, Mr. Pearson, did not answer at once. Through the broad doors that led to the Ocean Drive he saw something that attracted his attention—something that sent the color into his pale face. Then he looked once more at the clerk.

"Yes—so am I," he said.

The formalities over, he strolled out upon the broad, low-roofed veranda.

"I thought so," he whispered to himself. He smiled gently at the something that had attracted his attention. That something was nothing more nor less than a steel-blue motor car, with Henri lounging in the chauffeur's seat.

But the girl had disappeared.

II

He had been quite right about the three pseudo Wall Street men who had registered with him at the Inn.

For at half past ten o'clock that very morning this young man of the Gladstone bag—he who had registered as Pearson —had slowly descended the outer steps of the Tombs in Centre Street, New York. Three men had unquestionably been waiting for him to come out, for they had skulked about the street, dodged about corners, stood in doorways, walked

up and down singly and together, for half an hour or more. And when he had come out, running, singularly enough, plump into them, they had been more or less startled by his appearance. His face was unnaturally pale—and a new, anxious, worried, harried look was fixed upon it.

From the Tombs he had stepped into a taxicab, and given a brief direction:

"783 West 73rd."

The three in their taxicab had trailed him, and had seen his cab pull up at 783 West 73rd, and had seen him get out. They knew an instant later, that he was consulting McIntyre, M. D., the only real nerve specialist in the world—and in their way, they were professionally glad that he was seeking medical attention.

"Needs it bad enough," the three said among themselves, "looks like a shadow, so he does."

Inside No. 783 their quarry sat facing McIntyre, a little bearded man with glasses.

"But I can't go away," he was protesting at the suggestion of the specialist.

The latter only smiled. "But you are going away, whether you can or can't. If you don't, you'll be dead inside of three months. I've kept track of you in the newspapers, and I know what you've been through. Well, you've got to quit, and rest—and when I say rest, I mean it. Don't go to Newport or Narragansett Pier."

"Thank Heaven for that," murmured the younger man, "where shall I go?"

The specialist ransacked a little drawer for a memo. that he needed. Finally he found it. "This is the place," he said at last, "Jersey Shore, Elsmere—the Sandringham Hotel. Quiet. Family place. No excitement. High class. Good food and lots of salt water bathing. That's the place for you." He leaned over and touched his patient on the knee. "Don't let anybody know where you are," he said, "give them the slip. That's my advice. Forget that you are who you are, and don't let anybody know it. That's the trick. Do as I say, or—"

His young patient, with his characteristic gesture, had drawn a hand across his face.

"Just left the Tombs half an hour ago," he began. But the physician waved his hand.

"Never mind about the Tombs," he said, "I don't care anything about the Tombs, or about anything else, and you don't either. You forget the Tombs—forget the newspapers, and the bank, and everybody. Just take care of yourself. Why don't you get married? Your wife would take care of you. Haven't you ever thought of getting married? Eh?"

His patient had flushed. "Yes," he stammered in reply, "I have—But—"

"But what?" persisted the specialist.

"*She* has never turned up," explained the other, "I've been looking for her for months and months and months—"

"For—whom? Have you seen her—lost her?"

His patient shook his head. "I've never found her yet," he went on, "all that I know is, that I'll know her when I see her."

"And—what then?" laughed the elder man.

"Then," said his patient earnestly, "then I'll marry her."

"Oho, you will, will you? How do you know you will? How do you know she'll like you? How do you know she wont be spoken for—married maybe?"

The other man shook his head. "I never thought of that," he said.

The physician rose and slapped him on the back. "Boy," he exclaimed, "you're just as sound as a dollar—strong as an ox, if it wasn't for fag. All you need is rest, and you've got to promise that you'll follow my directions and begin right now. You'll go away to-day?"

"All right," assented the other, "I suppose I've got to, haven't I?"

He pressed McIntyre's hand, passed out, re-entered his taxi, and rode away—with three men trailing behind him.

He had literally obeyed the specialist—up to the moment that he had seen the girl from the window of the parlor car. Then he had deviated into a path of his own choosing. And here he was on the veranda of the Ravenswood Inn, staring interestedly at the steel-blue motor car.

"I wonder," he thought to himself, "if she is already spoken for—married, for instance. That would be awkward."

He fell to musing about this probable misfortune, and the lines settled back into his face. There kept throbbing through his overtaxed nerves a new and vital cause for worriment.

"It can't be," he told himself, "for, didn't she beckon to me—the fates must have arranged that part, at least."

A bell boy touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Pearson," he exclaimed.

The guest started. "Who?" he demanded. "Who is Mr. Pearson and what does he want?"

"Beg pardon, sir, thought you were Mr. Pearson."

"So I am, so I am," answered the guest hastily, "what do you want?"

"Gemmen to see you, sir—in the office, sir. Shall I send him out?"

"No, I'll go in," returned the guest named Pearson.

In the office, waiting for him, there stood an individual with a pointed black Van Dyke beard—a man whom he had never seen before. This individual held out a cordial hand.

"You're the man I'm looking for," he said, "I was afraid at first, you weren't. I'm Dr. Crocheron from across the way. I've been requested to take a look at you, if you don't mind." Oscar Pearson was perplexed. "Who asked you to take a look at me?" he queried.

Dr. Crocheron smiled mysteriously. "You called on Dr. McIntyre in little old New York to-day, didn't you, Mr.—er —Pearson?"

Pearson was relieved. "Ah, to be sure—so he's keeping his eye on me—to see that I'm following directions." Then he stopped. "But I didn't follow his directions," he exclaimed suddenly. "I was to go to Elsmere, whereas I came to Ravenswood, instead. How did you know?"

The local practitioner shrugged his shoulder. I treat everybody in both places," he returned, "news travels fast."

Pearson moved toward the elevator. "Come up to my room and have a smoke," he said. The physician complied, and the two men sat down in an upper window for the space of a quarter of an hour and listened to the beating of the surf along the shore.

They chatted in a desultory fashion. "The only thing I

wanted to warn you against, Mr.—er—Pearson," said the doctor finally, "is the drinking water down here. It's rotten bad."

"Will it make me sick?"

"Quick as a wink."

Pearson laughed. "Then why do you warn me?" he queried. "If you hadn't warned me, it would have made me sick, and that would have added to your fees."

The physician tossed over a card. "Crocheron Spring Water is what you want to drink," he remarked.

"Crocheron," mused Pearson, "why, that's your name."

The local man nodded. "I get it two ways," he admitted, "if they drink my water they have to pay for it—and if they don't drink it, they have to pay for it. Not a bad idea."

He started from the room. "Take good care of yourself, Mr. Pearson," he commented, "I've got to leave you. I've got a patient on this floor—other end of the hall. A Mrs. Ingraham—asthma. See you later. Good day."

The guest, Oscar Pearson, descended once more to the low-roofed veranda. When he reached there, the steel-blue motor car was nowhere in sight. But even while he smoked, pacing up and down, it hove into view along the Ocean Drive, and finally drew up at the *porte cochère* of the Inn. The girl alighted, for she was in the car. And so did her companion —a big, broad-shouldered, ruddy faced individual with prosperity stamped all over him.

"Old enough to be her father, confound him," mused Pearson.

Without looking to the right or left, the girl swept on into the big hall, and her big companion followed suit.

Pearson, strolling past, saw out of the tail of his eye, that the two had waylaid Dr. Crocheron, as that eminent gentleman was coming down the stairs.

"Better, much better," was the doctor's comment.

As he came out on the veranda Pearson buttonholed him.

"Doctor," he asked, "who is that big chap, anyway?"

Crocheron smiled. "He's Ingraham, the Cleveland banker. You ought to meet him."

"I certainly ought," went on Pearson, "and—who's the girl?"

Crocheron laughed. "That's the way the wind sets, is it," he exclaimed, "the girl is his daughter—she's too good for Cleveland, let me tell you that, and too good for Ravenswood. Her places are Manhattan Borough and the Pier. But the old man comes here because it's quiet, and because it gives his wife—she's my patient—a rest from keeping house. And the girl—" the doctor drew a long sigh.

"You know her?" queried Pearson.

"Yes, I know her," responded the physician, "that is, I have been introduced to her, but she is as cool as a cucumber." His eyes narrowed. "Funny thing, Mr. Pearson, I've known that girl for two seasons, and I've known other men who know her, but she's just the same to all of us, and I've figured out that they're waiting—she and the old man and the old lady—just holding back and waiting for the right man to come along. And I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that when he does come along, he'll be the man that the old man wants and the old lady, too. My notion of the girl is that she'll stand for anybody that her family pick out."

Pearson flushed and smiled. "Do you know," he said, "I've formed quite a different opinion of Miss Ingraham."

"Do you know her?" asked the doctor hastily.

"No," stammered Pearson, "I've only seen her, but my view is that the old man and the old lady can go to thunder, so far as she is concerned, when she makes up her mind."

The doctor crooked his finger. "I'll let you in on something, Mr. Pearson," he confidently went on, "the girl does what her father says, and the old man does what his wife says, and the old lady is stuck on anybody that's got a good new remedy for her malady."

"What's her malady?" asked Pearson.

"Never you mind," retorted the doctor, "I'm the man that's going to cure her."

"I should like to know the girl," said Pearson, quite casually.

Dr. Crocheron nodded. "There's a hop here to-morrow night, Mr. Pearson," he said, "I always take them in. I'll be here and I'll introduce you. Maybe you'll help fill in the time until the right man shows up."

"Until to-morrow night," said Pearson.

"To-morrow night," echoed the doctor, striding away.

When he had reached the far corner of the hotel, he waved his hand before he turned it.

"I wonder who the deuce that fellow Pearson is," he thought, "somehow they're mighty particular about him."

And as for that fellow Pearson, he stood staring into the vistas, with an unlighted cigar in his hand.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said to himself, "if the right man had come along."

Now, in justice to this man Pearson, be it said, that not for one instant had he expected the girl to renew the enforced acquaintance so strangely begun at the railway station, without the observance of the usual conventions, nor for one instant had he contemplated an attempt to force himself upon her. He saw, therefore, in the sprightly young Dr. Crocheron, the thin edge of the wedge. But it was not the doctor, after all, who introduced him to the girl. That office was performed by an individual of much greater importance, for Pearson was still pacing the veranda when Ingraham, the Cleveland banker, once more entered the arena of events.

He waddled to a settee, tossed upon it all the New York evening papers, leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction, and also viewed the vista that Pearson had been contemplating.

Pearson trembled. It's a delicate matter to strike up an acquaintance, at any time, with a gentleman of prosperous appearance, and if Pearson ever had been master of the art, his art now forsook him. He went at it much in the same way that he had approached the girl.

He paced back and forth in front of the banker and finally faced him.

"Down on the five o'clock, sir?" he inquired.

The banker swept the young man with his glance, and then turned away.

"Um," he murmured, and picked up one of his afternoon editions and buried his face in it.

This brought Pearson to his senses. He knew he had made a mistake in making the slightest advances to the old gentleman, for the old gentleman ignored his presence as

completely as though he were ten miles away. But experience had taught him that there was a way to remedy this mistake. He therefore seated himself upon the other end of the settee and smoked silently and in meditation for many minutes.

Suddenly the Cleveland banker threw up his head and snorted. "Confound these New York banks," he cried, "They're countrymen."

He looked at Pearson and waited for an answer.

"I say they're countrymen," repeated the old gentleman.

Pearson gave no sign.

This brought the old gentleman up all standing. For the first time he looked Pearson over to determine what manner of young upstart this might be, who declined to respond to a civil question from a Cleveland banker.

He started slightly, for he had recognized the fact that Pearson, stranger as he was, at least bore earmarks of a gentleman, so he tried it on again.

"They don't know enough to go in when it rains," he added.

Pearson gave no sign.

This indifference made a deep impression upon the older man. He had supposed when Pearson first addressed him, that Pearson, by reason of that fact, must be his inferior. Pearson's present complacent ignoring of him now, produced quite the opposite impression. He was convinced that the stranger must be somebody quite superior, for he could not recall, in all his prosperous middle west career, that anybody had ever withstood his own advances.

But there was one thing that he had not noticed, that at the mention of the New York banks, the face of the young stranger slightly flushed. But the old man kept on with persistence.

"What do you think of it, sir?" he bellowed.

The younger man turned to him with a startled glance. "I beg your pardon, sir," he returned, "were you addressing me?"

The old man's tones were those of one who crawled. "I was just reading the account of this Tri-State robbery," he ventured. "The Tri-State Trust Company must have been crazy to let a thing like that happen under its nose."

This time the young stranger nodded complacently, but his face now turned exceedingly pale.

"You're delving into rather ancient history, Mr.—"

"Ingraham, of Cleveland, sir," exclaimed the other, "that's my name, Ingraham."

Pearson smiled. "Has the news of the Tri-State robbery just filtered through to Cleveland?" he inquired.

"No," snorted the banker, "I read about it—and you read about it—and everybody read about it, six weeks ago, but I see by the *Post* they have just let their paying teller out on bail."

"What was the bail?" asked Pearson.

"Fifty thousand," said the banker.

"Pretty stiff," said Pearson, "no wonder it took him six weeks to get it."

"It's not enough," returned the other. "That chap stole a couple of hundred thousand if he stole a cent, and I want to tell you if I was a depositor or stockholder in the Tri-State Trust, I'd rip up the management from the president down to the runners, for letting a fellow get away with that much coin."

The young stranger shrugged his shoulders. "They say the Tri-State Trust is as solid as a rock," he ventured.

"Well, then, they ought to change their management," said he, of Cleveland. "Here's this young paying teller—they hadn't had him for more than five years—takes all that stuff out of the bank, walks out, by George, in broad daylight, packs the stuff in somebody else's suit case, steals the suit case from an officer of the bank, and then like a fool runs away with some woman, and they caught him. No wonder they caught him—blamed idiot, with that suit case and the initials on it and his giving the name of Oliver Partridge to suit the initials on the case, why a ten year old could have caught him."

At the other end of the settee the man Pearson was turning paler still.

"You must confess, sir," he replied, "that the teller was pretty slick, at any rate."

"Well," admitted the old man grumblingly, "he was slick in everything but running away with that woman that he

did. She gave him up and made money by it too. I want to tell you," he went on, "that things happen in New York that would never happen in my town of Cleveland, nor in my bank."

The young man rose sniffing the salt air. Once or twice he passed his hand over his face with that weary gesture that seemed part and parcel of him. He drew out his cigar case and passed it over to his new found friend, but on opening it discovered it was empty.

"I beg your pardon," he went on, "but I have some Duodecimos up in my room, if you wouldn't mind stepping up there, sir."

The old man responded genially. "I'd walk a mile to get a Duodecimo," he said.

Together they strolled up to the young stranger's room. No sooner had they entered it than the young man's eyes lighted upon his Gladstone bag, with the initials O. P. painted in glaring black letters. He stooped hastily, swung the bag about and turned the initials to the wall. Then he rang for the waiter, and the banker of Cleveland and the mysterious young stranger from New York sat down for a half hour's talk.

Suddenly Pearson pricked up his ears. For sometime a peculiar rasping noise had penetrated into the room from some adjoining apartment.

"They must have a rhinoceros—or an elephant—or an ostrich—or a whole menagerie, in that room," he exclaimed, after a long silence.

But the Cleveland banker, warmed by the genial contents of a decanter and soothed by the Duodecimos, merely shook his head.

"That is neither an elephant, nor a menagerie, nor an ostrich," he informed his host.

"What is it, then?" demanded Pearson.

"That," said the banker, "is Mrs. Ingraham, my wife."

Pearson apologized profusely. "I certainly meant nothing disrespectful, sir," he exclaimed. "But may I ask you, is she ill?"

The banker waved his hand. "It's chronic, sir," he returned. "A case of asthma, she suffers like the dickens."

The eyes of his young host brightened. "You don't say so," he replied, "and can't the doctor help her?"

"She's got one now," returned the banker, "that she swears by. Local man, Crocheron. He's been treating her for three summers here—that's why she comes here. She thinks he'll cure her in the end."

"And you?" asked Pearson.

"Not a bit of it," returned the banker. "I've got no faith in any of them. By the way," he added, "sometime I'd like to have you meet the missus and Miss Ingraham."

"Miss Ingraham?" queried Pearson politely.

"My daughter," said the banker, "I want you to know them. By the way, where are you from?"

"I'm a New Yorker," responded Pearson.

"And your business?" asked the other.

"Um," said Pearson, slowly, "Well, to tell the truth, I've always been connected with a bank."

"By George," exclaimed the old man, "then you can tell me what I want to know. My bank is looking for a new line of New York credit. Maybe you can help me. Who can tell?"

"I should be very glad to, sir," said Pearson.

He strolled to the window and looked out. Across the way on the board walk three men were lounging. They were natty, well dressed, up to date. From time to time they glanced toward the Inn.

They were the three men, be it said, who had leapt from the moving train behind the New York stranger that very afternoon.

III

Mr. Cutty Wortman, of the Borough of Manhattan, expanded his chest with pride. He glanced with considerable complacency at his shining shirt front.

"It was little Cutty pulled these glad rags out o' the wreck, Red," he remarked, "you was against it. When we made the get-away, it was you who lost your nut, it was me who held me nerve. It was me knowed then just as I'm tellin' you now, that there aint no place that's closed to a

couple of guys that is rigged in a clawhammer swallow tail full dress evenin' clothes, specially at a swell summer joint like this." Mr. Cutty Wortman paused as though for a reply. There was none save for the incessant pounding of the incoming sea and the distant strains of the string orchestra at the Inn, for though Mr. Wortman was of the Borough of Manhattan, he was not in it. He was, in fact, at least sixty miles away from that old-fashioned town, lounging genteelly upon half of a board walk bench. The other half was occupied by his bosom friend, Mr. Red Cullen, also of New York. His bosom, also, was in glittering expansive evidence. In front of them stretched a narrow strip of white sand, and then the sea in its majestic mystery. Behind them was the glitter of lights that railway time-tables designated as Ravenswood, N. J. Past Mr. Cullen and his friend surged the summer crowd, in pairs—always in pairs. The moon cast a shimmering radiance over all and its rays were caught and cast back from two glossy shirts as from a mirror.

"Say," persisted Mr. Wortman, nudging his friend, "Where would we've been, if it hadn't been for me."

Mr. Cullen merely grunted. "Go on," he cried at length, "we'd have been dippin' for supers on Broadway, and makin' money at it. See." By which remark, Mr. Red Cullen meant to intimate that the art of relieving metropolitan citizens of their gold time-pieces, was still in its prime. "We'd 'a' made a barrel of money by this time," he complained.

"Huh," said Mr. Wortman, "we'd look swell on Broadway—every cop on every corner with his eyes peeled for us after that last get-away, and Lord knows how many plain clothes pounders after us an'—"

"Plain clothes," retorted his companion, "that's what we need, plain clothes an nothin' else. Look at this crowd on this here board walk—white flannels an' such. There aint a glad rag in the bunch. An' as for dicers—say," he cried, as he eyed Mr. Wortman's headgear in disgust, "there aint a brown derby in the bunch."

Mr. Cutty Wortman caught his companion's burly arm in a mighty grip. "Bo," he returned, "you're pickin' now.

And what I say is don't you pick. I'm doing this. Of course," he commented, "you don't see glad rags on the walk, but you wait till nine o'clock till the hop begins up there. Then we'll go up and we'll find a whole bunch o' full dress suits and brown derbys there, see if we don't. And besides you know why we're here and who we've got to do."

Red Cullen slewed about in his seat and glanced longingly at the Ravenswood Inn. It was a massive structure, was the Inn, with small balconies in abundance on every floor. Red Cullen sighed. "Gee," he complained, "I wish we had Nice Kelly with us. What a bloomin' busy place for a second story man. Nice Kelly would certainly fit in—"

Cutty Wortman was seized with a fit of silent laughter. "He would be a six story man when he finished up," laughed he. Suddenly with a new and more insistent grip, his brawny hand tightened upon Red Cullen's wrist.

"By George, Kiddo," he whispered, "Here comes our meat. watch out."

Red Cullen sniffed in momentary excitement. "Show him to me," he exclaimed. He followed the gaze of Mr. Cutty Wortman and noted that it rested upon two figures that had stepped suddenly from the darkness into the full glare of an electric light. They were coming from the Ravenswood Inn. They were headed for the board walk.

"The swell," whispered Cutty Wortman, "now who was right about glad rags? Watch out."

They watched out. The man they watched was a tall, cleanly built, clean cut chap, who swung along with a certain lithe grace, due partly to his shoulders and his slenderness, and partly to the careful cut of his dinner coat, for he too, affected a shirt front. Beside him swung along a girl—a girl who somehow seemed a fit mate for him.

It is due, however, to the business fidelity of Messrs. Wortman and Cullen to say here and now that though their eyes devoured the man, they totally ignored the girl.

Red Cullen grunted in the ear of his companion. "Are you sure?" he queried. "Sure," replied Wortman *sotto voce.* "I tell you he carried the biggest roll I ever see anywheres, and he's always got it with him. Maybe you never heard of a walkin' treasury. Well, you're looking at one now."

After that, the moon, the crowds, the sea, the sand, everything faded from the view of the two men on the bench. They became oblivious to everything save this—a dark-clad figure stalking by the side of a slender white one.

And as for the dark clad figure the night was playing tricks with him, for it seemed to him as though he could see nothing save the eyes of the girl beside him, hear nothing save her voice, feel nothing save the unconscious pressure of her shoulder against his. But, unfortunately, his conversation did not match his state of mind.

"Do you think that Crocheron—doctor fellow, is doing your mother any good?" he queried.

"Oh," answered the girl, "if anybody can do her any good, he can, I am sure. He is a terribly clever specialist, I think."

"You don't say," returned the young man, coldly, "and yet he's been three summers at it, hasn't he?"

"Yes," she answered, "but mother has been at it for thirty summers, and he's done her more good than anybody else."

"Well," grumbled her companion, "I'm no specialist, but I want to tell you that my Aunt Charlotte—"

"I beg your pardon," said the girl, "your Aunt who?"

"Aunt Charlotte," replied he. "Stunning name, isn't it?"

The girl shivered. "It's a trifle more graceful than your own," she answered gaily.

"Great Scott," he answered, "don't you like my name? Don't you like the name of Oscar?"

The girl glanced daringly at him. "Do you want me to tell you something," she began frankly. There was some strange quiver in her voice that riveted his attention immediately.

"Yes," he said eagerly.

"Not now," she returned, "go on, tell me about your Aunt Charlotte."

"My Aunt Charlotte," he laughed, "is the dearest, most strait-laced proposition in the family, but she was possessed of a few devils. That little old maid had nothing but hay fever, colds in the head, asthma, and very likely membranous croup, but asthma was her pet. The point is that she doesn't have it any more."

"What cured her?" asked the girl.

"That's telling," responded Pearson, "and besides it's a

secret—Aunt Charlotte's secret and mine. All I can say is it was a cure Aunt Charlotte didn't want to take. She had to break one of her most stringent commandments and was compelled to adopt a method that placed her, in her mind, in the ranks of a third rate actress. I wonder how the old—your mother, Mrs. Ingraham, would feel about it."

Impulsively the girl laid a hand upon his arm. "I think mother would go through anything to be cured," she said.

"Maybe I can help her," went on Pearson. "If she is willing to take just what Aunt Charlotte did and bear the brunt. To this day Aunt Charlotte claims that her hopes of reaching Heaven have been seriously disturbed—" He broke off suddenly. "I interrupted you," he said. "Tell me what you were going to tell me when Aunt Charlotte butted in upon our conversation."

They had reached the end of the board walk and the girl was about to turn back when he held out his hand.

"Do you mind walking on the sand," he asked, "on down there, toward Old Beach?"

The girl glanced back toward the Inn. "We're a long way from home," she faltered, for she felt that her disapproving mother was rocking impatiently and with gasps, to and fro, in one of the big front rooms, and she had told her mother that she would be gone for a half hour and she was now upon her second hour with the young stranger who had jumped from the moving train and nearly lost his life the day before.

"I know," he answered, to her protest, "but it's summer, there's a moon, and the beach is as firm as asphalt. Come."

They descended the steps and strolled along the beach.

"Now, what were you going to tell me?" he persisted.

Again the girl darted toward him a daring glance. "I was going to tell you," she half whispered, "that the only thing I don't like about you is your name."

"What part of my name," he queried, "is it that you don't like, the first part or the last part?"

"Oscar," she exclaimed.

"Well," he answered lightly, "let's take another name. How is Oliver?"

"Never," said the girl.

"Ordway, then," he ventured.

She smiled and nodded. "Ordway is not bad," she admitted. "Ordway will do."

"For the present," he went on, "you can call me Ordway."

"For the present," she said, "I shall call you Mr. Pearson."

"Now," he asked, "is that all you had to say?"

"I can't think of any more," she answered.

"Then," he went on, "let me tell you something, let me tell you the history of my jumping off that train. It's a short history, but it's true. This was not my station. I merely looked up and out of the window of my car and saw you, and then I jumped off. Do you believe me?" he asked suddenly.

The girl tried to force a laugh. "I don't know that it signifies," she answered.

"Yes, it signifies," he went on breathlessly, "and this is a question that you must answer, for there was just one instant yesterday when you looked at me as I crossed the tracks that gave me the right to say the things I do. Do you believe in love at first sight?" he asked abruptly.

The girl drew herself up unconsciously. "You are getting to be very ridiculous, Mr. Pearson," she returned.

"In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of one thousand," he went on, "I should be. This happens to be the thousandth case. It's the one case that's not ridiculous. Say, look here," he blurted out, "I don't believe your eyes were telling fibs yesterday afternoon when the 3:30 pulled in, and I don't believe you're going to pick out some fellow, whose name is not Oscar, just because the old—I mean, just because your father and your mother tell you to."

The girl drew back. "Why, where did you get this fund of information, Mr. Pearson?" she inquired.

"Never mind," he went on desperately. "I want to tell you something about myself. Ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper, I have been pushed—and pushed—and pushed. I've worked like a slave all my life up to now, and the older I got the harder I worked. I've thought of girls—lots of girls—girls by the dozens, but I've never had time to think of *the* girl." He drew his hand across his face again. With all his apparent confusion and enthusiasm, there still was upon him some terrible weariness that told. "I'm

fagged out," he went on, "it's nerves. I didn't know I had any until the last two months."

"That's why you've been so white," the girl said suddenly.

"Yes," he answered, "and you've noticed that."

She nodded. "The sun did wonders with you to-day."

He went on. "They told me I had to go away," he said, "and I went on the first vacation, the first real one, that I've ever had. I little knew that I was going to look out of a car window and see you and know—"

The girl shivered. She well knew she had no right to listen to all this, which from any other man would have seemed to her like twaddle. She felt, too, that a portly figure, gasping in a rocking chair, back at the Inn, was forcing itself upon her consciousness. Yet there was something about this man, this Oscar Pearson, that drew her out of herself. She could not seem to hold him entirely at arm's length.

"Go on," she faltered, but he didn't answer. There was a reason for it. He could not answer, for at that instant two burly figures hurled themselves through the air, dropping as from the heavens, upon this Oscar Pearson, and bore him to the ground.

"A-r-r-hh," he gurgled, for they had him by the throat, these two.

"Breast pocket, you dub," muttered Mr. Cutty Wortman of New York, for it was indeed he—Mr. Cutty Wortman and his friend Mr. Cullen—strong arm men par excellence.

The girl stood as though petrified—but for one instant only. Then she uttered a piercing shriek that might have reached the heavens.

"I'll take care of her," said Red, "you do the rest." And it is due to Mr. Cutty Wortman and to Red to state that on his part Mr. Wortman tried to "do the rest" and Mr. Red Cullen tried to "take care of the girl." But as a matter of fact he did not take care of her and as a matter of fact Mr. Cutty Wortman did not do the rest, for at the girl's shriek a strange thing happened.

Three men—three other men sprang immediately into view, and even as the strong arm men had dropped from the heavens, these three seemed to leap from the earth, and as

well working parts of one machine, they closed in upon Cutty Wortman and his friend and bore them to the earth, and then the battle raged—a noble warfare.

At its end, two very much crumpled shirt fronts and four very black eyes were tied together and marched along the beach. One man drove them in front of him at the muzzle of a gun, the other two stepped to the side of Oscar Pearson.

"Much hurt, sir," they inquired.

"Not a bit of it," answered he, "and much obliged."

"Come on, sir," they exclaimed, "we'll see you safely home."

But Pearson was staring wildly about him. "Where—where is she?" he inquired, dazed.

"Beg pardon, sir?" said one of the men.

"She," cried Pearson, in alarm, "I had a lady with me. Wait, here she is."

He was quite right. She had slumped into a little white heap on the sand—had fainted dead away.

"We were not thinking of the lady, sir," said one, "beg your pardon, sir."

She regained consciousness in an instant, and regained it only to find herself lying somehow in his arms.

"H-H-Helen," he was stammering, very clumsily, but very earnestly, and so softly that only she might hear, "you won't forget that it was first sight for both of us."

The girl released herself and stood very straight. "What a terrible thing to happen," she cried, referring to the hold-up rather than to Mr. Pearson's floundering declaration. "Come, we must go home at once."

They did. Pearson and the girl swinging on in front and two of their rescuers bringing up the rear.

One of the latter nudged his friend. "Blamed if I didn't forget all about the girl," he said.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Can't take care of everybody in the whole place, can we, eh?"

"I should say not," replied the first, "we ought to have six men to take care of him alone. Blamed if I think three is enough for a lively chap like him."

Miss Helen Ingraham and Mr. Oscar Pearson ascended the Inn steps side by side. Miss Ingraham was hysterical. "I don't know what to tell my mother," she exclaimed.

"Tell her the truth," said Pearson glibly, "tell her I proposed to you and you accepted me."

"That is not the truth," replied Miss Ingraham, "and anyway I mean about the accident—and where it happened—and why."

She told her, spent half the night telling her, in fact, conscious of the terrible disapproval in her mother's eyes, but told her only about the moonlight stroll and the attack.

"You had no right to leave the Inn," her mother said, "you know nothing of this man, Pearson."

"Father does," replied the girl.

"Your father," went on her mother, "knows nothing about him, nobody knows anything about him. I've asked everybody, sick as I've been—" Suddenly she stopped. "Who were those three men who rescued you?" she asked.

IV

That was the mystery that troubled Ravenswood from that time on. Through all the subsequent excitement—for the hold-up made big talk—that one feature over-shadowed all the others. It was a pleasant diversion for Ravenswood to stop talking and to hold its breath next morning as the tall and interesting Mr. Oscar Pearson entered the dining-room and nodded to Miss Ingraham. Pleasanter still, perhaps, for all Ravenswood to stand in line at the lock-up and look upon the countenances of Mr. Cutty Wortman and Mr. Red Cullen of New York. Pleasant to discuss the impending romance. But—*who were the three men?* In the day time they were but little in evidence, they kept somehow out of sight; but at night denizens of Ravenswood, grown accustomed to traveling in pairs, were startled now and then by three skulking shadows—here, there, everywhere. And these shadows meant one thing and only one; that somewhere near, pacing the board walk or on the sand, gazing out to sea, there might be found Mr. Oscar Pearson and Miss Ingraham.

"Swim to-morrow?" inquired he of her on the morning after. The tide will be about right for us at half past ten."

"Just as you say," she answered, "only my mother's case is

getting desperate. Even Dr. Crocheron admits his failure, and I've got to spend most of my time with her."

Pearson smiled insinuatingly, "And if you didn't spend most of your time with her," he asked, "who would you spend it with? I think," he went on hastily, "that I'll have to bring down my Aunt Charlotte's remedy from New York. Of course, I sympathize with your mother, but it's mighty serious that most of your time is taken up with her. That's the thing that Aunt Charlotte's cure has got to fix. Then we'll see who takes up most of your time."

"Of course," she answered, "there's Dr. Crocheron. I don't mind saying that I'm very fond of him—"

"You'll surely swim to-morrow?" he said.

"I promised you," she answered.

"All right," he said, "I'll bring my tires along." For by this time, be it said, Pearson's luggage and his long, low racer had been brought from Elsmere, his intended destination.

Next day they swam. Those were glorious days, as side by side, when they tired of the long arm strokes, Pearson and the girl reclined on the surface of the sea, each ensconced safely within the buoyant circle of a Mastodon tire that rose and fell upon the waves like some magic cockleshell.

"Rocked in the cradle of the deep," sang Pearson, in a baritone that startled the crowd scattered in groups upon the beach. Side by side, buoyed by the air inflated circles, they swam out—out—out, forgetting everything save themselves and the magic of the sea.

Suddenly from the shore they heard hoarse shouts. It was then that the girl lost her head. She glanced up to see the crowds waving, and realizing for the first time that they were far out beyond the hardiest swimmer—beyond the hardiest swimmer's distance. Someone on shore had realized this and the shout invaded the girl with a sudden sense of danger. All that she need do, in truth, was to lie still and paddle back to shore as she had paddled out, but in her sudden fright she slipped somehow out of her supporting tire and Pearson caught her just as she disappeared beneath the waves.

"What's the matter," he cried sternly, "you're perfectly safe—you can't sink—nothing can happen." But the girl

was beside herself with fright. She had lost confidence and her nerve had gone.

For answer she merely stretched forth two shapely arms and clung tightly to the man's neck, sobbing hysterically.

Pearson, badly handicapped, could only thrust one arm through both the tires and hang on. He could not swim, for her grip upon him was too tight. All he could do was to support her and trust to luck that she might regain her equilibrium. A forlorn hope, probably, and the situation was one of real danger, for they were drifting out to sea.

The crowd on the shore were quite as helpless, all but three men. Like parts of some machine, these three rose, dashed coats and shoes to the ground, and swiftly ran out a canoe, head on across the breakers. In less than ten minutes they had reached the pair and checked their outward progress.

"Now," said one of the three, "climb in, while I hold her steady, sir."

He was referring to the canoe, not to the girl. His two companions each had a hand on Pearson, clutching him anxiously.

"Climb in, sir," they exclaimed.

"Climb in nothing," replied Pearson. "What about the girl."

"We'll take care of her, sir," they answered carelessly, "you climb in."

Pearson laughed. "You're a great bunch," he said, glancing at them quizzically, "who are you anyway?"

"Lifesavers, sir," they answered, without knowing just what else to say.

Pearson grunted. "Women and children last, eh," he went on, "so that's the lifesavers' code. Steady now, lift her in carefully. Now I can swim to shore." He did, but they stood carefully by, making sure he was safe. Twice, in their eagerness for him, they nearly tipped over the canoe, but finally the brave little craft rose bravely on top of a breaker, and before they knew it, they were all upon the beach, and another page of Ravenswood romances had been turned. Another link in the golden chain that the little cupids were making, had been forged, and once more the mysterious triumvirate had come to the front.

"Plays her cards mighty well anyhow," whispered the

eighteen year old wiseacres at the Inn, as the girl and Pearson drove back in his car, after this episode.

"Who is he anyway?" asked one of them.

"Nobody knows," replied the other. And therein, like Mrs. Ingraham, they spoke the truth.

Once more that estimable lady found herself under the necessity of reproving her headstrong young daughter, but the girl suddenly and unaccountably was defiant.

"Mother," she said, in a tone of voice that was new and unaccustomed, "don't you think that perhaps I am the best judge of my actions, after all?"

"Leave the girl alone," Ingraham, the banker, said to his wife that night. "She's not going to marry this young chap, and from the conversation I've had with him, he knows New York banks from A to Z. I've got to get a line of credit, and I've got to get it right away, my dear, or there's going to be trouble out in Cleveland. This chap can give me pointers, and I need pointers just now, as badly as our bank needs money." He slumped down into a chair and wiped his brow. "My, but I'm tired," he said, "I've been all over New York to get what I want. I've tackled every big bank but the Tri-State Trust, and to-morrow I'm going to tackle that."

The next day he left the Inn at eight a. m. just as Pearson, in his low racer, pulled out of the garage.

"Hold on there," cried Pearson, "don't take that stage. Where are you bound for, Mr. Ingraham?"

"New York," said Ingraham, "where are you?"

"I'll take you up," replied the younger man, "I'm going to make a flying trip myself."

That afternoon, Ingraham, the banker, more fatigued than ever, strode into his wife's room at the Inn.

"By George," he said, "I couldn't see anybody at the Tri-State Trust. They're all upside down there, probably due to this confounded thief of a teller that robbed them. Everybody tells you that the Tri-State Trust is as sound as a dollar, but it acts like a chicken with its head cut off. Couldn't get hold of anybody that could do me any good and—" He stopped suddenly. "What's the matter," he exclaimed. Grouped around a couch were two figures, a man and a woman. The man was Crocheron, M. D., and the

woman was the banker's daughter Helen. Propped up with many pillows was the banker's wife, wheezing her very worst.

"Father," said Helen, "I think we'll have to go back to Cleveland at once, mother has never been as bad as this, have you, mother?"

Her mother admitted it between gasps, and also asserted without hesitation that Dr. Crocheron had seemingly fallen far short of success.

Crocheron was wringing his hands. "I don't know what more I can do for you, Mrs. Ingraham," he said, "I've applied all the known remedies, and you know this is a thing that can't be cured and must be endured."

Helen Ingraham held up her hand. "Wait a minute," she exclaimed, "somebody told me of a remedy, a real remedy. I think we ought to try it."

"Who told you?" inquired Crocheron.

"Mr. Pearson," she faltered.

"That's the first time I ever knew he was a specialist," exclaimed the doctor.

"Pearson," echoed her father, "why, he's in New York, he took me up this morning in his car, left me at the corner of Wall Street and Broadway, and went up town. Maybe he's gone for good."

"No, he hasn't," returned his daughter, with an air of very positive assurance.

For an instant the sufferer on the couch forgot her asthma. "How do you know, my dear?" she asked her daughter.

Her daughter did not reply, for at that instant there was a knock upon the door. Ingraham stepped to the door, opened it, held a whispered consultation, and then came back into the room. "It's the man we were talking about," he said. "and he wants to talk to you."

"To me?" asked Helen.

"No," returned her father, "to your mother. Wants to see her right away."

Helen's face flushed. "Perhaps," she suddenly exclaimed, "he's got Aunt Charlotte's cure."

"Aunt Charlotte," exclaimed her mother, "you have no Aunt Charlotte."

"This is his Aunt Charlotte," corrected the girl, "not mine."

Ingraham once more opened the door and Pearson entered. He was still pale, though the sun had made some inroads on his pallor. He still had that air of weariness. He strode to the bedside. "Mrs. Ingraham," he said, "I've brought you something that will cure you, if you'll consent to try it."

Dr. Crocheron frowned with professional disdain. "What new remedy is this, Mr. Pearson?" he inquired.

"That," returned the young man, "is something I shall divulge only to Mrs. Ingraham. May I see her alone?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Ingraham, who was willing to submit to any experiment, to go through anything to relieve her suffering.

"Certainly," echoed Helen.

The doctor and the banker looked at each other in amazement, but Pearson with a considerable display of executive ability and self-possession, stood at the door and politely bowed everybody out. Then he locked the door, took a small packet from his breast pocket, and sat down by the bedside.

"Mrs. Ingraham," he began, "my Aunt Charlotte—"

Fifteen minutes later a young man stepped into the center of a small group of people clustered upon one of the many balconies that clung to the Inn. "She's very much better," he announced smilingly.

Helen pressed forward and touched his arm. "Did she take the remedy?" she asked.

He nodded. "She did," he answered, "though I'm convinced that it shocked her sense of the proprieties to a great extent."

"What the dickens did you give her?" queried Crocheron.

"That," said Pearson, "as I've already indicated, is her secret, and it shall be mine."

These four people sitting in the balcony did not observe three men, who casually strolled up and down in front of the Inn, nor did they observe that these three men stopped short, and that one of them pointed somewhat unconventionally toward a wide window of the Inn that faced the ocean.

"Jerusalem," said one of these three men to his two companions, "look at the old lady in that window. She certainly has all the earmarks of a dead game sport."

"That's a queer note," said the other. "I always thought

she was a staid old proposition. She's the wife of that banker from the West."

"Well," said the third, "she certainly doesn't look like a staid old proposition now."

The three passed on, and Mrs. Ingraham, totally unconscious of their observation, but fully conscious that for the first time in many years she had become wholly comfortable, sat complacently in the open window and smoked one of Aunt Charlotte's long black medicinal cigars with the utmost nonchalance of manner.

V

"I tell you, the man's a thief." Ingraham, the Cleveland banker, strode nervously up and down the big rooms that composed his suite at the Ravenswood Inn. Before him, hanging on his words, sat his wife, still puffing on her fireside companion, one of Aunt Charlotte's Perfectos. His daughter Helen sat at a broad window gazing out at sea.

"A thief," echoed Mrs. Ingraham, "it can't be possible."

"I tell you it's true," went on the banker. "Haven't I been in his rooms dozens of times, smoking his cigars, drinking his old port and telling him stories; and haven't I seen that tell-tale Gladstone bag with the letters 'O. P.' painted on it; and yet, by George, he fooled me, even me. It never struck me until to-day that the man was an impostor, that he's a masquerader, and it's as clear as daylight now. This chap Pearson is the thieving teller of the Tri-State Trust."

He turned suddenly. Helen was coming toward him with blazing eyes.

"That isn't true," she said in a low voice, and yet some unusual confusion seemed to rest upon her. "It can't be true."

The old man stalked to a big closet in the room, threw open the door and pointed to a top shelf. "Your mother," he went on, "keeps every newspaper that she lays her hands upon. There's the bunch up there, every one of them since we landed here."

He disappeared into the closet and a grunt or two indicated some unusual exertion on his part. He came back in a moment, bearing a pile of newspapers a foot in height, and

tossed them on the bed. Then he shook his finger at them. "Those sheets there," he exclaimed, his face reddening as he went on, "they will tell you—read them again. They'll show you that the very day this fellow came here—that that very day he got out of the Tombs—was let out on bail. Why was he so pale? What was the matter with him? Six weeks' confinement in the cooler, that's what's the matter with him. Follow the story down. You remember his going to New York a week ago with me, what did he go for?"

For answer his asthmatic wife held up her black cigars. "For these," she gasped gratefully.

"Not a bit of it," answered her husband. "Read your newspaper. He went up to plead to another indictment they had found against him; you can't tell me. Take an hour off and go through that bundle on the bed and you'll find that the Tri-State teller and this man Pearson are identical. I tell you," he repeated, "he's a thief."

"But his money," exclaimed the banker's wife. "He's made of money."

"Made of money," snorted the Cleveland banker, "of course he is. Didn't he get away with hundreds of thousands."

"But they wouldn't let him keep it," she returned.

"Wouldn't let him keep it," he repeated, "of course they wouldn't if they knew where he kept it, but in order to get it they've got to sue him and get a judgment—they've got to issue execution and they've got to find out where it is. That fellow only had to put up fifty thousand cash on the first indictment. They were afraid to let the public know that he had gotten away with more. Only fifty thousand out of all that cash, and he's got the rest except what that woman took away from him."

Helen Ingraham turned pale, but her eyes still flashed. It's not true," she said, but her tone exhibited more hesitation than indignation this time.

"And there's his automobile, his racer, there's property that they can take," exclaimed Mrs. Ingraham. "Why don't they take that?"

"Ha," returned her husband, "he's probably got it in his wife's name, that's the reason. He's probably got everything fixed so that they can't get at it."

"His wife," echoed Helen stammering. "Has he got a wife?"

"I should think he had," retorted Ingraham. "Why don't you read the papers."

Helen drew herself up. For an instant she threw all uncertainty from her. "Father," she exclaimed, "you are totally mistaken. You don't know this man: if you really knew him you would understand that he is incapable of being a thief, incapable of anything that you have charged against him."

Ingraham smiled a supercilious smile. He knew that he could shatter all their doubts at one stroke and he had reserved this stroke until the last. His forefinger shot out toward his daughter as though to pin her with the force of his argument. "The old man's wrong, eh?" he demanded. "Well, then, just explain one thing to me, what in thunder do these three men mean, who follow him? Tell me that."

The stroke was an effective one. The argument was absolutely unanswerable. Helen sank into a seat at the window, her lips closed, her hands clasped, thinking.

Mrs. Ingraham, wheezing a bit at this startling conclusion, only puffed the harder on her cigar.

"These three men," went on Ingraham, "mean this and only this, that the District Attorney of New York County is not going to let this chap, who has put up less than one-third of what he stole as bail, get out of his clutches."

Mrs. Ingraham regained her composure. "Maybe he stole these antiseptic cigars," she cried. And added "I only hope he'll steal some more."

Ingraham stood over Helen. "Helen," he said, "you've been having a good deal to do with this chap. You've taken a long chance, even if he were the best instead of the worst. Now, you know he's the worst—you know all he's done, and from henceforth I want you to leave him severely alone. Though I'm sure," he added with a bow, "that I don't have to tell you that."

Helen didn't answer. She didn't change her position at the window, but her mother waved her hand excitedly to attract attention.

"Helen," she spluttered, coughing, "don't say anything to offend the man until he steals some more of these cigars."

Helen did not answer her father's seriousness nor her

mother's gayety. She rose and swept swiftly from this room into another, closed the door, locked it, and sat down alone.

"Confounded shame," said Ingraham to his wife, "that fellow made a deep impression on the girl. I don't blame her, for he's made a deep impression upon me."

His wife blew smoke rings. "And on me," she added.

"However," sighed Ingraham, "she'll do as we say—she'll leave him alone; she'll cast him off before these people find out who he is. Let's hope they'll never find out."

Helen started in bravely to leave Pearson alone. Her first step toward it was to indite a brief note to him and send it to his office, requesting an interview that night.

Singularly enough, Pearson had done the same by her, and the two, each in solitude, read and somehow gloated over these summons to a tryst. But Pearson little knew what was in store for him.

Hours later, the girl sat upon a little hillock of dry sand, listening to waves that she could barely see, for the night was dark. Pearson fumed and fretted at her side.

"What's the trouble with me," he exclaimed insistently. "Don't you know that that one moment at the railway station made you as surely mine as I am yours? Doesn't your inner consciousness tell you that?"

"It does not," replied the girl coldly. Suddenly she turned to him. "Tell me one thing, Mr. Pearson," she exclaimed, in a cruel, hard, uncompromising voice, "have you told me the whole truth about this?"

Pearson laughed. "No," he answered, "why should I do that. How can it signify. I wanted to know that you wanted me for myself—for the man that I am, if I'm any kind of a man at all. I didn't want to tell you the truth until after we had settled that."

"Have you nothing to tell me?" she inquired, her voice growing harder still as she proceeded.

Her belligerent manner affected him unpleasantly. Her coolness froze him. Under other circumstances he might have made a clean breast of everything, but something combative within him kept him from it. He thought for a moment and then he answered her.

"I've just one thing to tell you," he replied. "My name is

not Oscar, thank Heavens, and my name is not Pearson, ditto. My name," he added in a low voice, "is Ordway Pelletier."

The name evidently signified nothing to the girl, and apparently he hoped it would not, for she sat silent—listless, even dejected, by his side.

Suddenly he seized her hand, but she drew it from him.

"Why?" he demanded. Then like a flash he had caught it and was holding it, staring down at it in blank surprise. It was her left hand and upon her third finger was a gem that gathered from the night all the night's darkness and turned it into brilliant rays of light. It was a solitaire diamond ring that he stared at for so long.

"This was not here yesterday—last week," he exclaimed.

"No," she replied, "it was not."

"Then," he returned, "there's somebody else."

She did not answer.

"Somebody else here in Ravenswood," he went on.

She still was silent.

"It's Dr. Crocheron," he exclaimed now, with tones of disgust, "Crocheron, that piffling proposition of a doctor—the village cut-up. What in Heaven's name can you see in him?"

For answer the girl stared into the darkness. For a long time they sat thus after he had released that hand of hers, with its portentous token. Finally he rose.

"Is that all you've got to say to me?" he asked.

"That is all," she answered.

She too, rose, and left him, a white figure against the blackness of the night. She swept on straight to the Inn, avoided all the loungers of both sexes on the broad veranda, sped swiftly to her room and locked herself in. Her first act upon switching on the light was to jerk from that third finger the sparkling gem and to cast it into a jewel box on her dressing-table.

"He thought," she said softly to herself, "that it was what it seemed to be. It was the best way after all—the best way out of it." She drew her hand across her eyes. "Ordway Pelletier," she whispered softly to herself, "somehow I can't believe that you are what they say you are, and yet—" Suddenly she switched off the light and threw herself face down sobbing upon her bed.

VI

"Straight road down the beach?" asked Pearson.

"Sure," answered the attendant at the Inn garage, "twenty miles, maybe, straight as you can go."

"Jove," answered Pearson, "just what I need. It's the only thing that will brace me up. Where's my man?"

His man was sent for and he came. "Henri," said Pearson, "I want you to put my racer in A No. 1 condition, and have it ready for me at three o'clock."

"To-morrow afternoon?" inquired Henri indolently.

"Not a bit of it," replied his employer, "three o'clock this morning. The moon will be up and I'm going to do something that I've never done before."

"Yes, sir," said Henri, "and what may that be, sir?"

Pearson drew a long breath. "I'm going to beat the world's record in a twenty-mile dash on the Shore Road, and I'm going to do it all alone. Three o'clock, Henri, to the minute."

Henri nodded, and retiring to the recess where the racer stood, switched on a dozen lights and started in to work.

Pearson gritting his teeth, digging his nails into the palms of his hands, went back to the beach to sit alone upon that little hillock of sand, to stare blankly for hours into the blackest of black nights.

No sooner had he left the Inn garage than Henri whistled to the uniformed attendant. "Say," he whispered in a hoarse voice, "you go an' tell one of them guys that is watching us, what you heard him tell me, do you understand?"

"Who are them guys?" asked the other man. "I see them here—there—everywhere. What are they watching for?"

"Search me," answered Henri, "all you got to do is to go and tell one of them, do you understand?"

"What will they do," demanded the attendant, "stop him?"

"Search me," replied Henri, lighting up a cigarette, "that's their business, not mine."

The attendant obeyed his orders, and Henri finishing his cigarette and tossing it into the safety of the night, started in on his allotted task.

In a half hour the three men he had sent for entered the

garage. "Anybody got a fast machine here?" one of them inquired.

The attendant, who had returned with them, nodded. "Mr. Pearson," he returned.

"I know," said one of the three, "but I mean anybody else."

The attendant looked around the place, and finally placed his hand upon a big machine. "This is the next fastest, gentlemen," he said.

"Who does it belong to?" demanded they.

"Mr. Ingraham, of the Inn," returned he of the garage.

The three put their heads together. "Well," they finally decided, "we'll have to see Ingraham, that's all." So they saw Ingraham and offered him a price to take out the car, and Ingraham, being a practical man of the world, and being also curious as to their mission, accepted their proposition and sent for his chauffeur. "And I guess," said Ingraham to himself, "that I'll just hang around to-night and see what's going on; there's something in the air." He hung round on the grill side of the veranda, drinking Scotches, and he was right about something being in the air, but that something did not eventuate until the moon had peeped up above the horizon—until the Cathedral clock inside was striking three.

Shortly after that the folding doors of the silent garage opened and a long low racer, like some midnight marauding rat, thrust its nose into the dispelling gloom, gave one or two squeaks of caution, grunted a snort of defiance, and then silently darted past him, swung into the Shore Road, and disappeared into the distance. He had only time to note that the racer bore but a single figure, and that that figure was Pearson. He waited then for a few minutes and waited not in vain. Silently, his own ponderous steel-blue sixty horse power, leaped in sight, François at the helm and the three mysteries as passengers. That, too, darted past him and that, too, swung into the Shore Road after the racer, like some huge rat terrier on the scent of some huge rat.

"I'll bet dollars to doughnuts," exclaimed Ingraham to himself, "that he's bound for Florida." And Ingraham went to bed.

It was at four o'clock in the morning that the night clerk downstairs, drowsily nodding in the midst of his long vigil,

was aware that the night bell was insistently ringing. He rose, and opened the door. Before him stood Dr. Crocheron.

"What's up, Doc," he demanded, "somebody 'phone you?"

"Nobody from here," answered Crocheron, "but they 'phoned me down the line to come right over here and stay here until I was wanted. What's up?" he asked.

"Blest if I know," said the clerk, "I haven't heard anything."

"Something must be doing," exclaimed the doctor, "I wonder what it is."

He did not wonder long, for at that instant the toot-toot of a motor car was heard in the distance, and before they knew it Ingraham's big sixty horse power had pulled up under the *porte-cochère* and three men were lifting a heavy object out of the machine.

Crocheron peered at them across the broad veranda. "What's the matter," he exclaimed.

"Matter enough," answered the three men in fearful tones, "smash up, man killed, and a ten thousand dollar racer gone to the junk heap."

They swung their burden into the full light of the hotel office.

"Dead?" asked Crocheron.

"No," they whispered, "but mighty near it, that's why we sent for you." They halted with Pearson's limp form between them and nodded to the clerk. "Can you give us a ground floor room?" they asked.

"Sure," replied the clerk. He darted across the broad hall and threw open the Governor's suite and ushered them in there. "Put him on that bed," he said.

Once they had desposited their unconscious burden on the couch reserved for high officials of the state, the three men fell back and permitted Crocheron to examine him.

"Jove, but he's smashed up," said Crocheron, going over the man carefully. He glanced at them interrogatively. "What was he trying to do?" he asked.

"Nobody knows," they answered, "only he went past the lighthouse at Shore Front faster than a streak of greased lightning. The night watch saw him pass—he was going like mad—machine swung from side to side—seemed almost beyond control.

At this juncture, Henri, who had been attracted by the hubbub, thrust his countenance into the room. He wrung his hands in despair. "I don't wonder, gents," he said, "I knew he'd get his, some time or other, and he did it once too often.

"Has he done it before?" asked Crocheron.

"Sure," answered Henri. "Any time anything gets on his nerves, so he can't stand it, he goes out and breaks the speed laws. Another man would take to drink, he takes to this."

Crocheron sighed. "I don't know whether he'll take to any others," he returned. Then swiftly while he stripped his patient, he gave brief directions in his professional low voice, directions for drugs, splints, bandages, for surgical aid, for everything that occurred to him, and not once during all this time did his patient regain consciousness.

The three men stood about the couch, looking each other in the eye. "It wasn't our fault," they assured each other, as though afraid of some rebuke that waited for them in the future. "How could we have helped it?"

VII

It was two days later. Ingraham, the banker of Cleveland, had sent word to the New York specialist, who was waiting to see him, that he would be glad to consent to an interview.

The specialist—and this specialist was the same man Pearson himself had interviewed on the day he stepped out of the Tombs—came to the point at once.

"Mr. Ingraham," he said, "this is a matter of life and death, and you won't lift your finger to save a life."

"I won't do the thing you want me to do," returned the banker, "and I don't see how it's going to save his life."

"Mr. Ingraham," went on the specialist, "this man's broken bones don't cut any figure in his present condition. If it were only broken bones, we could pull him through. It's a question of nerves, shattered nerves, sir, and ever since that man recovered consciousness, he's been calling for your daughter Helen. Sir, I'll pit my knowledge against that of any expert in the world, and I say to you that the presence

of your daughter in that room is going to save this man. Her absence is going to kill him."

"It will have to kill him, then," remarked the Cleveland banker.

In desperation the specialist left the room, and Helen, pushing open her own door, entered it. "Father," she exclaimed, "I heard what he said, and I know—I believe he speaks the truth. I'm going—going down."

Ingraham gripped her wrist as in a vise and forced her into a chair. "You'll do just what I say," he exclaimed. "I'm not going to have your name in the papers, the talk of all New York, linked with the name of this thief downstairs. You'll do just as I say, if you don't I'll lock you up—do you understand?"

Helen understood. She leaned over, burying her face in her hands and wept as though her heart would break.

Downstairs the specialist was 'phoning to New York. He was talking to somebody in the Wall Street district. "You had better come down here at once," he warned the man at the New York end of the wire, "and knock something into this fellow's head, I can't."

Two hours later a natty looking individual was ushered into Ingraham's apartment. "Mr. Ingraham," he said, "I'm the representative of the International Insurance Company of New York. We've got a branch in Cleveland."

"So you have," exclaimed Ingraham, passing his cigars, "and your Cleveland branch banks at my bank."

"Exactly," replied the natty individual, "and it keeps large sums of money on deposit there."

"Best customer I've got," murmured Ingraham gratefully.

The manner of the natty individual changed at once. "Mr. Ingraham," he exclaimed ferociously, "you don't want to lose your best customer, do you?"

"No," returned Ingraham, paling.

"Well, you will," thundered this individual, "if you don't do what we say."

"Wh—what do you say?" stammered Ingraham.

The stranger tapped Ingraham upon the shoulder. "You follow the directions of our friend, the specialist, downstairs, friend Ingraham," he remarked ominously. "Do everything

he says, and we'll stick to you. Decline, and you don't get a dollar of our money on deposit. Do you understand?"

Ingraham, terribly agitated, threw open Helen's door, and called to her. "Helen, my dear," he cried, "Helen, you must come with me."

Twenty minutes later Ingraham was standing outside of the Governor's suite of rooms on the ground floor of the Inn. Inside, as he knew, were Crocheron and the New York specialist—and his own daughter Helen. From time to time, reports of the injured man's condition filtered through the doors and were gobbled up by the groups of guests who ranged themselves about the entries to hear every bit of news.

Finally the specialist hustled out. He caught Ingraham by the lapel of his coat. He seemed to have forgotten his resentment toward that gentleman. "Mr. Ingraham," he exclaimed, "I've never seen anything like it in all my experience. Talk about mental suggestion, telepathy, or influence of one mind upon another. The instant that your daughter entered that room, my man knew it without opening his eyes. 'There she is,' he said, as she came in. These were the first words he uttered, other than the constant calling of her name. 'There she is,' he said and opened his eyes and held out his hand—his right arm, you know, is not broken—and then, Mr. Ingraham, as your daughter stopped a minute and said, 'Mr. Pelletier,' he smiled, actually smiled, sir, and he said, 'Can't you do better than that?' and from the minute, Mr. Ingraham, that that girl uttered his first name 'Ordway' —from that instant this young man's recovery has been a fact assured."

The doctor beckoned to him the natty individual from the International Insurance Company, and clutching him with his left hand, while he held Ingraham with his right, he retold the tale with gusto. "Most remarkable thing in my experience," he commented.

While they were standing there, two people approached them. Two strangers they were. One was a woman in a long cloak with a veil about her face, and the other was a youthful business man. The woman started for the door and had her hand on the knob before she was detained. She

whispered some words to the man at the door and he nodded toward the specialist. "You'll have to see him," said the man. She swept toward the specialist and caught him by the arm.

"I must see him," she demanded.

"You can't," returned the specialist.

"I must," she answered, "it may be a matter of life and death; I always have a wonderful effect upon him when he is ill, I don't know why, but you must let me see him."

She pressed her card upon the specialist and he looked at it, though it meant nothing to him, and under the force of her insistence, he found himself entering the apartments with her. Once inside, he found her not at all amenable to reason; she simply swept past him as one who could not be stayed, and burst into the room where lay the injured man, and then she stopped. And at the same instant she stopped, the heart of Helen Ingraham seemed to stop beating, too, for Helen noted that the injured man had turned to this woman with a new light of something more than recognition in his eyes, and with a clutch of fear upon her, she saw this other woman stride to the other side of the bed, near Dr. Crocheron, and kneel down.

Crocheron tried to restrain her. "Who are you, madam," he exclaimed, "his wife, or—what are you doing here?"

"She is neither," answered the patient, feebly, "she is only my Aunt Charlotte. Let her stay."

Outside the door the youthful looking business man was arguing with the representative of the International Insurance Company. "Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that I can't see Mr. Pelletier. Nonsense. I've got to see him."

"I'm on guard here," returned the insurance man, "and I'll see to it that you don't see him. He's seen enough already."

"But this is a matter of life and death," pleaded the other. "I must see him and he must see me. If he knew I was here he would insist upon it."

The insurance man wavered. He felt after all, perhaps, that he was not authorized to interfere quite as fully as he started out to do, so by way of compromise he nodded and said: "Suppose you tell me your business, if it's important, and I'll take the message to him."

The youthful business man looked about him, looked at

Ingraham and concluded, evidently, that he was to be trusted, although a stranger, and then he went on to tell his troubles.

"We're all higgledy-piggledy up in the Tri-State Trust without Pelletier," he said.

Ingraham interrupted him. "Pelletier," exclaimed Ingraham, "I've heard that name somewhere. Who's Pelletier?"

"The man inside," returned the insurance man, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

But the other man went on. "You tell Mr. Pelletier," he said, "that we won't bother him exiept about one thing. There's a cheap skate banker over in Cleveland, of the name of Ingraham, who wants a line of credit at our bank, and we've put him off and put him off until we can't put him off any longer. Ask him what we'll do."

Ingraham turned scarlet. "Cheap skate banker," he exclaimed, "do you know who you're talking about—do you know who you're talking to? I'm Ingraham."

The other man was not even feezed. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Ingraham," he remarked, "even if you are a cheap skate banker." He held out his hand. Ingraham ignored it.

"We don't let paying tellers like our friend inside," he thundered, "loot our banks out in Cleveland, I can tell you. You New York chaps have hayseed in your hair."

For answer the other stepped to the door and said a few words to the doorkeeper, and finally was admitted.

The insurance man smiled mysteriously at Ingraham. "You don't imagine, sir," he asked, "that Mr. Pelletier is an absconding paying teller, do you?"

"I know he is," returned the banker. "I've followed that paying teller's crime all through the papers, and this man's history has all the earmarks of it. He's a thief."

The insurance man held up his hands. "Dear me," he exclaimed, "a thief!"

At that instant the specialist returned and joined the little group of two. The insurance man nodded to the specialist.

"Doctor," he laughed, "Mr. Ingraham here thinks that Pelletier is the paying teller of his own bank."

"Why, my dear sir," interposed the specialist, "Pelletier is a millionaire—he's the president of the Tri-State Trust—he's the man whose dress suit case that paying teller stole

when he stole the funds, and this man Pelletier, overworked as he is anyway, worried himself almost to death about the thing."

"Not about the dress suit case?" asked Ingraham.

"No," replied the insurance man, taking up the doctor's story, "but because of this: he, the president of the Trust Company, was the only official in the bank at the time when the paying teller stole the money. The paying teller did it right under his nose, and for that reason Pelletier felt responsible in the same degree as he would have held a watchman responsible for letting a burglar get away. It worried him to death."

"I should think it did," said the doctor, taking up the story, "and after that Pelletier spent most of his time in the District Attorney's office trying to get him to refuse bail, and up at the Tombs trying to worm out of that paying teller the secret of his hiding place where he had stowed away the loot. Pelletier told me, in fact, that he thought he ought to pay back to the bank himself the money that the paying teller robbed them of. Meantime, Pelletier's nerves were going by the board. He had to get away from business —go where business couldn't find him."

The insurance man shivered. "I should think so," he sighed, "with business at his heels every minute of his time —he had to get away incog."

Ingraham, his face flushed with these disclosures and with the mistake of his own diagnosis, was silent for an instant. Then he tightly clutched the doctor's arm.

"I think you're fooling me, gentlemen," he said slowly. "I think this man is that paying teller, and you're merely friends of his, trying to shield him. If I'm wrong, why is it that three New York detectives follow this Pelletier about. Can you tell me that?"

The insurance man turned pale. "Did you know they were following him about?" he asked.

The banker nodded. "Well, they didn't do their duty very well, then," returned the representative of the International Insurance Company. "Their instructions were never to show themselves, unless necessary, and never to let Pelletier know that they were watching him."

"It was necessary, several times, for them to show themselves down here," burst in Ingraham, and he told about the incidents of the hold-up and of the ocean rescue. "But," he persisted, "there's a method in their madness that, I figure it, the District Attorney of New York understands."

The insurance man hesitated for a moment, and then he looked Ingraham in the eye.

"Mr. Ingraham," he exclaimed, "you're our banker out in Cleveland, I suppose I may as well let you into the secret. The doctor here is on. You didn't know that this young Pelletier is a crank on life insurance. Millionaire as he is, he came to us for a Two Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollar policy. After that, do you think we can let him wander around alone, taking all kinds of risks? No, sir, we can't even let him get sick safely. The International Life Insurance has got to see that Ordway Pelletier lives out his three score years and ten. Now, do you understand?"

Ingraham wilted. He understood, but he had no time to apologize, for at that instant he felt a tug upon his coat sleeve, and his daughter Helen drew him toward the door and into the room of the injured man.

"Father, she exclaimed, "if you want that line of credit in the Tri-State Trust Company, you had better ask *us* now."

That evening as the dusk slowly settled down upon the Ravenswood Inn, those who paced the board walk in the twilight, glanced from time to time upward toward a moving spectacle. That moving spectacle disported itself upon a balcony. It consisted of two elderly ladies, apparently at peace with all the world.

Aunt Charlotte blew smoke rings into the heavens. "This is a lovely spot," she murmured.

Mrs. Ingraham blew another set of smoke rings that rose and twisted themselves about Aunt Charlotte's.

"Have you missed any of your cigars lately?" she inquired.

Aunt Charlotte lit a fresh one. "I should think I have," she answered genially, her face widening to a broad but dignified grin, "and Ordway has been filching them from me, the young thief."

Angelo

BY JOHN A. MOROSO

JAMES TIERNEY pressed a pearl button on his desk in the handsome Wall Street suite of James Tierney, Inc., and supplemented the electric summons with a series of shouts for his first lieutenant, Mickey Reilley.

Reilley bounced into his chief's office with a shameful apology for a salute.

"Reilley," began the head of the famous private detective agency, with the expression of a martyr on his clean shaven, homely countenance, "y'gotta find me a Carrie again, a real nice Carrie, one of those things with a little walking cane, a fried-egg hat, yellow shoes and all the other frills."

Reilley looked his displeasure.

"Say," he asked, "what we runnin' now, a college annex?"

Tierney held before him a letter from one of his directors and backers, a Broad Street banker who had gathered an almost criminal share of the country's wealth.

"Yow! Wow!" he grunted as he studied the epistle. "Here's Mr. James Frothingham Phillips, one of the guys what put us in business, asking to have his daughter, Ione—get that name?—shadowed."

"What she doing, shoplifting?"

"Nix; making love to the family chauffeur."

Reilley dropped into a chair and put his head in his hands.

"Say," he groaned, "if they keep shootin' this kind of business at us we'll get to be a set of nice old ladies, believe me. I t'ought we was put here to look out f'r the banking business and watch the yeggs."

Tierney looked at his aide with glassy eyes.

"We're here to do just what they tell us to do," he said. "If your conscience hurts yuh, go up to police headquarters and work with the bulls until you're cured and then come back f'r a job." He grinned sarcastically.

"There's only one swell guy in reach," Reilley said, surrendering promptly. "He's outside now smoking a perfumed cigarette and making the office smell like—"

"Trot him in."

Reilley went to the waiting room and returned immediately with William Winthrop, only that very morning rechristened "Boston Willie."

Willie nodded patronizingly to Tierney as he stood flickering at his gray trousers with a silver-topped cane. He was a well set-up youngster of twenty-five, with broad shoulders, bright, clear, blue eyes, silky complexion and the hint of a smile playing about patrician lips.

A gorgeous blue scarf relieved the neutral gray of his well made morning suit. A black pearl set in carved gold for a stickpin was his only ornament. His gloves were chamois and of such freshness that it was evident that he was accustomed to having people open doors.

"How-do, Mr. Tierney," he said in a Harvard drawl that would have made an Eliot lecture sound like a Salvation Army appeal.

"How-do," repeated Tierney.

"It's—ah rawther a pleasant—ah morning."

"It's grand," said Tierney. "I gotta job f'r yuh."

"Thanks awf'ly, y'know, and all that sort of thing."

Tierney began to feel a pounding in his head. Reilley loomed in the background, grinning fiendishly as he watched his chief suffer.

"D'yuh know a society girl named Ione Phillips?" he asked when he felt that he could proceed without loss of reason.

"Ione Phillips?" repeated "Boston Willie." "I've heard the name. Ah, yes! She was at the Pawmer cotillon last New Year's eve, I believe."

"The Pawmer cotillon?" asked Tierney.

The young man nodded.

"*The* Pawmers, y'know," he explained.

"How do you spell them?"

"P-a-l-m-e-r-s."

"Oh, I gotcha, Steve," cried Tierney. "Yuh must excuse *me*, Mr. Winthrop. I don't talk Boston very well."

Reilley left the room to avoid an explosion of mirth.

"What about the—ah, young lady?" Boston Willie asked.

"She's trying to get the family chauffeur to elope," explained Tierney getting down to business. "She's the only daughter and her paw wants her to marry a duke, or anyhow, nuthin' cheaper than a count. He's got the price and if there was any kings in the discard he'd spend a few millions and pick one up."

"Jove," exclaimed Willie, "I remember them now. She's the daughter of Old Man Phillips."

"K'rect," said Tierney, "on her father's side and of Old Lady Phillips on her mother's side."

The smile about Willie's lips broke into a series of wide-spreading ripples and his eyes sparkled. "Ha!"

That one "ha" alone escaped his lips. It represented laughter. Mirth had stirred him profoundly.

When he recovered from this outburst Willie placed a gloved hand to his side as if it ached.

"My word, Mr. Tierney," he said, "you are droll."

Tierney looked at him suspiciously.

He made a mental note of that word "droll." He would look it up. His stenographer had a dictionary.

"Anyhow, Mr. Winthrop," he said, "yuh gotta see that she don't elope with the chauffeur. The gir-rl's paw writes me that he is a very handsome chauffeur, but he is a wop."

"A wop," repeated Tierney. "Some people would call him a Guinea, others might call him a Joe and I guess he calls himself an Eyetalian."

"Oh!"

"My talk is the rough stuff, Mr. Winthrop, but I'm telling you what yuh gotta do," went on Tierney, seriously now. "Don't let Ione marry the wop. Marry her yourself if it is absolutely necessary—but use that only as the last resort. You know you ain't no duke or even a count. Her old man's got all the money that Rockefeller didn't have time to pick up. Go out and hire the finest gazump that ever burned benzine. Buy all the fine clothes and little hats that you want. Blow yourself to more neckties and walking sticks. Do just as you please. If I sent Ione's paw an expense bill under a thousand a week he'd think I was loafing on the job and only a piker. Just see that she don't marry the family chauffeur."

"Why don't Mr. Phillips fire the chauffeur?" asked Willie.

"Why?" repeated Tierney. "Because just as soon as he fired him she'd run away and nothing could prevent her marrying the guy except sudden death. She'd give up home and candy and everything else and start life all over again in a hall bedroom with one gas jet and a frying pan. She'd take in washing until her husband got another job. That's the way they all do when the handsome chauffeur is fired."

CHAPTER II

"Angelo, you forgot the book of sonnets!"

Ione Phillips, half recumbent on the springy auto cushions, was canopied by a low swinging bough of dogwood, heavy with snowy white blossoms. At her feet rippled and purled a brook which the spring freshets forced laughingly on its way to a river down in the valley. The golden gleam of the dog's-tooth violets in the sward at either hand made a rug such as even the hired connoisseurs of her multi-millionaire father could not hope to spread upon his floors.

Anemones, in their soft, fawnlike coats, peeped toward her like so many pretty nuns. Shyly they took glances at her abundant feminine vigor and beauty.

"Si, signorina mia."

Angelo hurried back to the abandoned automobile in the road and brought the sonnets.

He was twenty-three years old—the skidoo age, the fine time of youth when mundane troubles are shed as easily as the rain from a well thatched cottage. He was lithe of form, had a perfect nose and lips shaped for kissing pretty girls. His brow was arched finely and his hair was raven.

Angelo was from the Piemonte, that delectable province on the Swiss border where the cool shadow of the Alps tries in vain to fathom lakes as soft, as sweet and as deep as the eyes of women. It was in this country, when she was on her way to Venice with her father, that they met for the first time. Mr. Phillips wanted a chauffeur who spoke Italian, French and English and Angelo fled his studies at the Uni-

versity of Torino to take the job and be near her and within the sound of her sweet voice.

"Did you bring the grammar book, too?" asked Ione.

"Si, signorina," he replied. "I bring eet sure."

Little patches of sunlight played about her, kissing her full lips, the pink lobes of her shell-like ears, dancing in her golden tresses and caressing her warm cheeks.

There was no sonnet in the book Shakespeare made that could approach in delectability the loveliness before Angelo.

"Now for the lesson," she said, making room for him on the cushions.

He sighed and began with the same old verb, the same, sweet, old verb which makes a tie that binds all young men and all young girls.

"Io amo," he began.

"Io amo," she repeated. "I love."

"Tu ami," he read.

"Tu ami—thou lovest," she echoed.

"Egli ami."

"Egli ami—he loves."

"Noi amiamo."

"Noi amiamo—we love."

Her hand touched his as she turned the leaf. He caught it and crumpled it in his own.

"Signorina, signorina amatissima," he said. "I love you, I love you so!"

She did not draw back from him or deny him the honey of her lips.

"Hello! Hello, people!"

It was as if all the first violins in the heavenly choir had popped their strings at the same moment.

They turned, frightened, and beheld the face of a young man amid the leaves of their trysting place.

"Beg pardon," said the intruder. "I saw a machine out in the road and knew someone would be near. I've lost my way, y'know. Could you help a chap reach Edgewater?"

Ione's face was crimson.

"Why," she gasped, "you are Mr. Winthrop, are you not?"

Willie removed a bulgy cap.

"And you are Miss Phillips, I do declare," he said in

feigned surprise. "Do forgive me. Really, I'm much distressed and all that sort of thing, what? Never dreamed for a moment it was your car in the road. Quite—ah stupid of me, Miss Phillips. But you'll forgive me, won't you?"

Angelo scrambled to his feet and began picking up cushions and books.

"We paused for a drink of water from the brook," Ione fibbed. "We are returning by way of Edgewater. You may follow my car."

"So kind of you," said Willie. "Lovely day, isn't it?"

"Yes," she replied coldly.

Angelo lugged the books and the cushions to the car in menial fashion.

"How about riding back with me in my new car?" inquired Willie as Ione reached the road. "It's a hummer."

"Thank you, but the road is new to my chauffeur and I must point out the way for him," she replied. "We shall be coming back soon. The ride along the Palisades is very beautiful in the spring-time."

Angelo had cranked up his machine with several vicious twists. She took her seat behind him.

"Full speed, Angelo," she whispered.

"I like to break hees neck, bella mia," growled her lover.

"He ees no gentleman, maledetto sia!"

CHAPTER III

James Tierney, incorporated, was going through his mail, the only task of the day he hated. He had passed through a half hour of agony and little beads of perspiration spangled his brow when he picked up a bulky letter in a monogrammed envelope. He opened it and spelled it out slowly:

"New York, May 15, 1912.

James Tierney, Incorporated, Triple Syndicate Building:

My dear Mr. Tierney—As instructed, I make a report on the case of Miss Ione Phillips. By your authority I have rented a seventy-horsepower runabout—$300 a week. This includes garage and supplies. I have also taken a small apartment in the Buxom Arms on Fifth Avenue, near the

Phillips home, $400 for the first month. For wardrobe, living expenses and so on I have expended this week $260.

On last Wednesday I followed Miss Phillips in my car. The chauffeur took her across the 129th street ferry to New Jersey. Near Clinton Point on the Palisades the car was stopped and Miss Phillips and the chauffeur left it. They made themselves comfortable beside a break in a boscage—

Tierney pressed a button and shouted:

"Nellie! Nellie Regan!"

His stenographer dashed into the room, pad in hand.

"Bring the little book," shouted Tierney in agitation.

She rushed back to her desk and returned immediately with a cheap edition of Webster's dictionary.

He pointed out the word "boscage" to her.

"Look it up quick," he ordered. "I dunno what it is but it sounds fierce. Them two young people might be dead by now."

Miss Regan flipped the leaves of the bok and finally read:

"Boscage, a wooded nook."

"Ah," sighed Tierney, "that'll do. I thought it was some sort of a swamp." He continued reading the letter:

"While in this sylvan retreat the young people lost no time in indulging in passionate osculation—"

"Woops, my dear!" shouted Tierney, pressing the button and yelling for Nellie once more.

"Gimme that book again and beat it out of here," he ordered. "None of this Eleanor Glyn stuff for you."

He delved into the volume.

"Osculation," he read, "kissing; close contact."

He threw the book into a far corner of the room, mopped his brow and returned to the letter:

I interrupted them on the pretext of having lost my way and got them started back to Manhattan. It is evident the chauffeur and Miss Phillips are in love and expect to elope.

By careful inquiry I have learned that Angelo, the chauffeur, is a skilled aviator and that he has a two passenger biplane in a big barn over in Bergen county, New Jersey. Miss Phillips is enthusiastic about flying. They may use the biplane for the elopement.

I ran down to Hempstead, Long Island, yesterday and bought the best monoplane to be found in the hangars. It was a bargain, only $3,800. It has high speed and a big fuel tank. It is warranted to fly 260 miles. I have had it shipped over to Jersey and placed in a barn less than a quarter of a mile from Angelo's machine. Very sincerely,

WILLIAM WINTHROP.

P. S.—The Italian cruiser *Il Vincitore* is due in the harbor the first of next week. She is to take on several aviators and American machines for use in the Turkish war. Angelo is very patriotic and he may take a job killing Turks from the air. The cruiser has a deck for launching and receiving air machines."

Tierney read the postcript a second time. "I got his number," he said slowly. "I got it right in my back pocket. He is going to buy a warship and charge it to Tierney."

He played a fandango on the row of buttons on his desk and called aloud for Reilley. "Reilley," he said when his aide poked his head in the door, "I want to ask yuh where yuh got that pretty little boy yuh call Boston Willie?"

"Advertised f'r a college graduate," was Reilley's reply.

"Did he have any references?"

"A wagonload."

"Read 'em?"

"Naw."

"Bring 'em here and deal me about five. I wanta see how my luck is running."

Reilley got the letters of recommendation and reference presented him by Willie.

One was from a friend of Tierney in the United States Secret Service. In effect it said that Willie was just out of college and was hunting excitement. He had handled two cases for the government and had handled them well. "He is afraid of nothing on earth or in the air," wrote Tierney's friend. "His only weak point is his disregard for money. He spends freely."

"What got your goat, Jim!" asked Reilley.

"O, the Angora is all right now," sighed Tierney. "I thought I was being bunked. I'm glad to hear he gets what

he goes after. The only thing to worry about is this one sentence, 'He spends freely.' Of course Mr. Phillips is a rich man, but if I send him a bill for a new navy to be used entirely by Willie he might peeve."

"A navy?" asked Reilley.

"Yes," replied Tierney. "He's got a seventy-horsepower car, a suite of rooms on the Avener, an airship and, I'll bet, at least forty new little hats and a hundred new little walking sticks. But I told him to get what he wanted."

"But if he sidetracks the gir-rl into marrying a duke or a count it will be all right, won't it, Jim?"

"It will, Mickey," Tierney replied, "but his first report is that last Wednesday he finds the lovers osculatin' in a boskidge over in Jersey."

"Cripes, that's somethin' fierce," said Reilley.

"Yes," mused his chief. "Willie has got to get busy pretty quick or Old Man Phillips will find himself with a wop-in-law on his hands."

CHAPTER IV

West of the Palisades the Jersey country rises in slow undulations like the swell after a storm in mid-ocean.

The village of Dumont is perched upon one of the highest of these hills, the top of which is flattened into a well tilled plateau.

At full speed the Phillips' auto swept through the town of Tenafly northward along the country road, took a cross road on the bias, tore through the village of Cresskill and disappeared to the west where the Dumont plateau spread level with the wooded tops of the distant Palisades.

Behind it came a roaring cloud of dust and gasoline fumes. Boston Willie clung to the wheel, steering the machine more by instinct and faith in the luck of careless youth than by the use of his keen young eyes, for his goggles were encrusted with oily earthflakes torn up by the car ahead.

The two machines fairly leaped to the Dumont plateau. The Phillips' car turned into the farm road of Peter Westervelt and the one behind kept on its way to the farm of Guy Verdon, an ancient native with broad acres and whiskers.

In two big barns a quarter mile apart Angelo and Willie got busy twanging the fine wires that held widespreading wings to the hollow steel piping frames of two air machines.

It was an early spring afternoon toward the time of the coming of dusk and where the fields were not turned up by the husbandman they showed goldenwide with dandelions and buttercups.

White clouds were piled in the eastern sky and a faint touch of gold tipped the scrollery of their edges, for the sun was dipping toward the western hills. The air was still save for the evening songs of the robins.

In the Westervelt barn Angelo tied a bit of string about the nifty walking skirt of Ione, hobbling her for safety's sake and not for fashion's. She took her seat behind the little perch of the aviator and Angelo wheeled the machine to a stretch of clover.

From the Verdon barn Willie Winthrop wheeled his monoplane to a stretch of level which a farmer had cleared of every stick and stone. Then Willie climbed to the hayloft and scanned the Westervelt field through a pair of field glasses. He saw a rival biplane in position and heard its exhaust snapping dully in the distance. He clambered down the ladder and jumped into his seat in the monoplane.

"When'll ye be back, young man?" asked the old farmer.

"God knows," replied Willie. "This is—ah—only my second flight and I have far to go."

"Don't be a danged fule now, son," said the Jerseyite kindly.

"Ha!" laughed Willie.

"Any of them flying men git killed down at the city today?" asked Verdon.

"Not a one," replied Willie, scanning the heavens above the Westervelt farm. "Four landed on the decks of the Italian warship and are now safely stowed below."

The ruffle of propellers sounded across the fields and the biplane with the elopers soared aloft.

Willie gave a warning, threw on his power, took firm hold of his steering levers and was off in pursuit through the air.

Like two great dragonflies the air machines soared in a

southeast course. They crossed the Palisades and steered to the south above the gleaming Hudson.

The biplane soared higher and higher in the air, Angelo knowing that he would thus avoid the counter currents of air made by the skyscrapers of downtown New York. Willie's monoplane, like a swallow, soared in his wake.

The gold touching the clouds in the east had deepened to crimson. The evening star was pallid in the skies and far over to the northeast the lights of Coney, Brighton and Manhattan winked in the sunset shadows beneath a crescent moon.

The Italian Cruiser *Il Vincitore* had already drawn anchor and was lying, with just enough steam in use to keep her motionless, at the mouth of the Ambrose channel. She was ready to start under full speed for the other side.

The biplane headed for it, dipped, made several wide circles and landed lightly on the aeroplane deck where a swarm of sailors were ready to catch it and hold it fast.

Three pillars of black smoke shot from the funnels of the war vessel as she got under way, gathering a great bone in her teeth as her speed increased.

Above and around her soared Boston Willie in his monoplane.

Thousands of commuters crowding the ferryboats watched, fascinated. They could hear the hum of his propellers.

Nearer and nearer the winged thing circled to the cruiser. With a last downward dip it swept around the fighting masts and then landed on the deck of the speeding vessel.

"Good Lord; what a feat!" cried a harbor skipper. "That birdman must be a lunatic!"

CHAPTER V

A short message from the Italian cruiser by wireless informed Banker Phillips that his daughter was safe aboard her and married to Angelo, the chauffeur.

The multi-millionaire went up into the air with a shriek of rage. When he descended he clamored for secretaries, clerks and messengers to get James Tierney, Incorporated, and bring him immediately to his office. Whenever anything

sensational happened among the heinously rich, whether indictment or elopement, the heinously rich immediately affected called in its own private police system.

Tierney was brought before the banker just as a smartly uniformed boy brought in another marconigram.

Phillips tore it open and read:

On Board Cruiser *Il Vincitore,* Via Marconi.
J. F. Phillips, 40 Wall Street, New York.

Angelo is the Duke of Torrigiano. Is admiral of the air fleet. Got marriage license in Hackensack. Married on board by ship's chaplain to Ione. Ship inside of three mile limit off Jersey coast. Duchess sends love and joins duke in asking blessings. WINTHROP.

In the directors' room adjoining the office of the banker a group of financiers were waiting to conclude an important meeting that had kept them downtown until after sunset.

Mr. Phillips let them wait and let Tierney stand nervously in fear of his wrath as he read and re-read this message.

"Duchess sends love!"

How well it sounded! The cloud of wrath left his ruddy, round face and he stroked his silvery siders with gathering complacency. Another messenger entered the room. He bore a wireless for Mr. Tierney, forwarded from his office.

The Incorporated One took it and opened it with trembling hands. It read:

On Board Cruiser *Il Vincitore,* Via Marconi.
James Tierney, Triple Syndicate Bldg., New York.

Could not have stopped marriage without use of battleship. Followed them to the altar in cabin of the commander. Duke is fine fellow. Made me second in command of air fleet of Italian navy. Pay Guy Verdon, Dumont, N. J., two thousand for burning his barn. Good-bye. WINTHROP.

Tierney looked up from the slip of yellow paper. Mr. Phillips had left his chair and was pacing his private office, his chest puffed out and his fat hands clasped behind his back.

"Mr. White," he said in crisp businesslike tones, "take this message, please."

His secretary was ready.

The Duke and Duchess of Torrigiano. Aboard his Italian Majesty's Cruiser *Il Vincitore,* he dictated. Blessings on my children. Cable arrival on other side. Will join you in three weeks at most. FATHER.

He turned to Tierney after a word to his secretary, commending haste in getting the wireless under way.

There is nothing more to be done, Mr. Tierney," he said. "I thank you very much for putting such an excellent man on an extremely difficult and delicate matter. You might send him a bonus with my compliments."

Tierney grinned feebly.

"Let me have your bill in the morning and I shall send you a check," added the banker.

Mr. Phillips opened the door to the directors' room.

"Gentlemen, I am very sorry to have kept you waiting," he said with large apology, "but only a few moments ago I received the news that my daugther Ione and the Duke of Torrigiano, one of the most illustrious young noblemen of Italy were married to-day."

As he was receiving his congratulations, proudly Tierney left the banking house and sought a long distance telephone.

He called up Guy Verdon in Dumont, Bergen county, New Jersey. He informed the whiskered farmer that he had received a message from Mr. Winthrop asking him to pay him for burning his barn.

"Yes; I burnt it," the voice of the Jerseyite squeaked over the wire. "Is the young man safe?"

"He's safe," replied Tierney. "But what was the celebration about?"

"There warn't no celebration."

"Why did he order you to burn it, then?"

"Why," came the voice from distant Jersey with a little laugh catching in the words, "he's a regular cut-up, that boy is. He sailed away from here just before sundown an' he 'lowed it might be night when he sailed back, if he sailed back at all. So he offers me two thousand for the barn and tells me to light it off after real dark set in, which I did the same. He said he would need a beacon to guide him to his landing place. He's a nice young feller."

Tierney told him he would mail a check in the morning and hung up the receiver. He took a roundabout way to his office, skirting the edge of the financial district until he struck Rose Street. He crossed under the third arch of old Brooklyn Bridge and came to the lowly tavern of one John Murphy at the corner of Rose and Duane. Placing a slippery nickel on Murphy's bar he asked for as large a portion of beer as the money would pay for.

As he sipped from his schooner he muttered to himself:

"One seventy-horsepower car, one aeroplane, one swell flat on the Avener, one large barn, a hundred little hats, two hundred little walking-sticks, one boskidge in Joisey, some hot osculation and one Jook!" He drank the last of the beer.

"But he's got brains, that kid," he added as he slammed through the swinging doors. "He's got brains. If he'd queered that marriage I'd have lost me jawb. Old Man Phillips has got his Jook and he got him dirt cheap as prices go nowadays, believe me."

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